Teachings on Meditation

by Thich Nhat Hanh

Edited by Jason Espada

Introduction

I have selected the following teachings on meditation by Thich Nhat Hanh for those who are new to the practice, as well as for older students. From the time I first saw Thay, on retreat in 1989, he has embodied for me what the teachings are about. His grace, dignity, calm stability and loving nature are communicated by his presence, in his voice, as well as his writings. His words on meditation, especially, are a real treasure.

I begin this collection with a basic method of meditation, based on his teachings. This is followed by his commentaries on the gathas, or short meditation poems that he has taught. His teachings on walking meditation are also included. For myself, walking meditation brings a good energy to the practice, which counters sleepiness, or lethargy. If I'm feeling restless, I've found that it's also very effective at calming body and mind.

What will work for a person is such a personal matter, I would suggest we experiment and see that is effective for us.

May we all we all receive the benefits of practice, just as our teachers intend.

Jason Espada
San Francisco,
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A Basic Method of Meditation

Here is a basic method of meditation, as taught by Thich Nhat Hanh in the late 1980's and early 1990's. Feel free to use this, if it works for you.

This method uses mindfulness of breathing, along with what are called 'gathas', or short meditation poems. We can be in the sitting position, or walking.

In sitting meditation, we sit with our back straight, in a posture that is both relaxed and attentive. Then, we simply breathe naturally.

In mindfulness of breathing practice, gently, patiently, and with clarity, we aim to bring one hundred percent of our attention to the breath. Our full awareness is given to the breath, all throughout the complete length of the inhalation, and the exhalation.

To show how we practice this, Thich Nhat Hanh gave us this illustration of mindfulness 'following', or staying with the breathing: He held up a pen in his left hand, lengthwise, and said: 'Let's say this is the length of your breath'. Then he held up the first finger of his other hand and said, 'And let's say this finger is your mindfulness. When mindfulness touches the breath, it's like this: (so saying, he placed his finger on one end of the pen).

When we breathe in, if we choose to, we can think 'in' (and as he said this he moved his finger along the length of the pen to the other end), and when we breathe out, we can think 'out' (and so saying he moved his finger back along the pen to the starting point).
'In' (moving along the pen to the end), 'Out' (moving back to the beginning). This is how we should practice, with mindfulness staying in contact with the breath.

He continued, 'When we leave our object, it's something more like this: It would be like thinking 'In' (finger moving along the pen), 'Out' (and back), 'In' (and then) 'Oh!, I forgot to turn off the light in my room' (and with this the finger leaves the pen and flies off into the air…) This is called leaving the object, or distraction. Instead of being distracted, we should simply stay in touch with the breathing, all throughout the entire length of the inhalation, and the exhalation.

If at times you find that your mind is restless, it can be useful to practice counting the breaths. Mindfully follow the inhalation, and the exhalation all the way through, in a relaxed way, and at the end of the exhalation, count gently to yourself, 'one'.

Breathing like this, you can count up to three, or four, ten, or twenty-one, as it suits your needs, and then start over again at one. If your attention wanders, just bring it back to the breath, and start over.

Another technique, offered by Ajaan Buddhadasa, in his book Mindfulness with Breathing, is to count the duration of an inhalation and exhalation, (for example, to the count of 5) and then to experiment with increasing this number (to 6, 7, 8, 9 or 10, or more). This automatically makes the breath longer, which relaxes us, quite naturally.

Practicing like this, conscious breathing with counting can be done at the beginning of a session, to settle and focus the mind, and to make it firm, before moving on to other methods, or it can be done for the whole session, as you wish.

When using the method of a gatha, in addition to this mindfulness of breathing, each line of a short meditation poem is repeated, to oneself, as many times as one likes before moving on to the next line.

The first word is brought to mind on the inhalation, and the second word, on the exhalation. We can use one gatha, or more than one.

The first gatha offered here is:

in - out (a few times) (and then)
deep - slow (a few times…)
calm - ease
smile - release, and
present moment - wonderful moment
(or, 'present moment – there are wonderful things in this moment…)

The gathas are a means to direct and to quiet the mind. When the mind is calm, stable, and clear, we can choose to continue working with the gatha, reciting a line one or more times, and then letting go of words and just being with the inhalation and the exhalation for a few breaths. Or we can let go of the words completely, and just be with the experience of breathing in and out quietly, calmly and lucidly. See for yourself what works best for you.

As a general rule, we should keep our practice as simple as we can, and use only the minimum amount of method necessary to bring our mind to a settled, calm and clear state.

A second gatha, if you wish to use more than one, has both a long and a short version. After learning the longer meaning, if we wish, we can just use the shorter one. It goes like this:

Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in,
breathing out, I know that I am breathing out

(practice as described above) (and then)

Breathing in, I see myself as a flower,
breathing out, I feel fresh

Breathing in, I see myself as a mountain,
breathing out, I feel solid

Breathing in, I see myself as still water,
breathing out, I reflect things as they are, and,

Breathing in, I see myself as space,
breathing out, I feel free

The shorter version of this, then, would be:

In, out
Flower, fresh
Mountain, solid
Water, reflecting
Space, free

A third gatha is as follows. In this one, each line is said to oneself along with the exhalation:

I arrive
I am home
In the here
In the now
I feel solid
I feel free
In the Ultimate,
I dwell

Walking Meditation

To wake up and steady the mind, or for a change of pace, to freshen the mind, you can practice walking meditation in a manner similar to that of sitting practice. Here, walking a little more slowly than usual, attention is placed on the breathing and on the contact between the feet and the ground. This is very soothing, very relaxing.

One method for walking meditation is to measure the length of the breath by the number of steps that are taken with the in-breath and the out-breath. ('one step, two steps, three, four… one, two, three, four…') (or, if walking more slowly, 'one…, two…, one…, two…'). Or, if you prefer, you can use a gatha, or you can just quietly follow your breath and the feeling of your foot touching the ground.

On the subject of walking meditation, Thich Nhat Hahn said, 'The quality of your walking depends on the degree of your concentration.' 'Don't lose any steps. If you have 100 steps, these 100 steps should be like 100 gems.', and, 'Each step can bring you peace and joy.'

Practice with patience, and with care.

My best wishes to you in your practice.

Teachings on Meditation, by Thich Nhat Hahn, selected by Jason Espada

On his gatha

In - Out
Deep - Slow
Calm - Ease
Smile - Release
Present Moment - Wonderful Moment

From A Dharma Talk by Thich Nhat Hanh, July 30th, 1997

Healing is Possible Through Resting

Good morning, my dear friends.

Welcome to the third week of our summer opening. Today is the thirtieth of July 1997, and we are in the Upper Hamlet. We have been practicing pebble meditation during the past two weeks, and I hope that the children who just arrived yesterday and today will continue with our practice of the six pebbles. There are children who have been here for the last two weeks, and they will show you how to practice pebble meditation. You'll have to make a small bag like this, and find six pebbles like this, little pebbles. Wash them very carefully, dry them, and put them into the bag.

Today we will learn a short poem together, young people and also less young people. We are going to use the pebbles to practice the poem also. It would be wonderful if you can memorize the short poem in order to practice. Many of you know it by heart already, but

there may be a few of you who have not been introduced to the practice of this poem: “In, out. Deep, slow. Calm, ease. Smile, release. Present moment, wonderful moment.” I guess most of us can sing it already. Shall we sing?

In, out.
Deep, slow.
Calm, ease.
Smile, release.
Present moment,
Wonderful moment.

This is a wonderful poem, because every time you practice it you’ll feel much better within your body and your mind. When you are angry, when you are worried, when you suffer, if you know how to practice that poem then you will feel much better right away after one or two minutes.

I am going to remind you of the way to practice. First, “in” and “out.” It means that when I breathe in, I know I am breathing in. It’s easy. And when I breathe out, I know I am breathing out. I don’t mix the two things up.

Breathing in, I know it is my in-breath. Breathing out, I know this is my out-breath. By that time, you stop all the thinking, you just pay attention to your in-breath and your out-breath. You are 100 percent with your in-breath and your out-breath.

It is like holding a baby in such a way that you hold it with 100 percent of yourself. Suppose this is a baby and I hold the baby like this. I hold the baby with 100 percent of myself. Remember, there are times when your mother holds you like this. Have you seen the image of the Virgin Mary holding the baby Jesus? She holds him like that: 100 percent. So here, our in-breath is our baby, and we hold our in-

breath 100 percent. “Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in.” You just embrace your in-breath, nothing else. Don’t think of anything else. That is the secret of success.

When you breathe in, you just breathe in, you do nothing else. Do you think you can do that? I am asking the adults also, do you think you can do that? Just embrace your in-breath with 100 percent of yourself—mind and body together. And when you breathe out, you embrace your out-breath. You identify your in-breath as your in-breath, because when I hold my baby I know this is my baby, not something else. So, “in, out” means, “breathing in I know this is my in-breath, breathing out, I know this is my out-breath.” It’s very simple, but it’s wonderful. I am sure that if you try it, after two or three in-breaths and out-breaths you will feel much better already. I can guarantee it because I have done it and I always feel wonderful.

If you are about to cry, if you are about to kick or hit someone else because of your anger, and if you know how to go back to yourself and practice “in, out” for three times, I am sure that you’ll be different. You will not cry, you will not kick, you will not punch because you are a much better person after the practice of “in, out.” Today, try and you’ll see the power of the practice.

Then after you have practiced “In, out” three, four, or five times, you’ll feel that your in-breath has become deeper and your out-breath becomes slower. Because when you are angry, when you are in despair, when you suffer, your in-breath and out-breath are very short and not calm at all. But then after having breathed in and out peacefully, your in-breath will be very smooth. Your out-breath, also. So the quality of your breathing has been improved. Your in-breath is deeper and calmer, your out-breath is also deeper and calmer. That is why we can practice “deep and slow.”

Breathing in, I know that my in-breath has become deeper, and the deeper it is, the more pleasant it becomes. Try to practice breathing in for a few times and you'll see that it is deeper. And when it is deeper, you'll feel a lot of pleasure. When you breath out, you say, "Breathing out, I know my out-breath has become slower, slower, more peaceful." If your breath is deeper, you are deeper. If your breath is slower, you are slower. It means you are more peaceful. So, breathing in, I know that my breath has become deeper. Breathing out, I know that my breathing has become slower. It's wonderful.

You might use your pebbles also. If you are practicing sitting meditation, you put the pebbles on your left, you bow to the pebbles, and you pick up a pebble with two fingers. One pebble. You look at it and you put it in the palm of your left hand and you begin to practice breathing in, breathing out. "In, out." The practice is smooth. "In, out." Once more. "In, out." You'll feel much better. Then, I use my two fingers to take the pebble up and I put it on my right side. I have practiced "In, out" already.

Now, I'd like to practice, "Deep, slow." So, I take another pebble. I look at it. I put it in my left hand and I begin to practice. "Deep, slow." It has become deeper by itself, you don't have to make it deeper. It has become deeper by itself alone because you have practiced already three times "In, out." That is why your breath becomes deeper naturally, and slower. Let us practice together "Deep, slow" three times. "Deep, slow" [pause for three breaths]. Good, we have finished with "Deep, slow. We pick up the pebble and put it on our right side.

Now we practice the third line, "Calm, ease." It means, "Breathing in, I feel calm. Breathing out, I feel I take everything at ease." This exercise is very wonderful to practice, especially when you are nervous, when you are angry, when you don't feel peaceful in

yourself. Quick, quick! You have to go back to your in-breath and out-breath and practice "Calm, ease."

This is an exercise given by the Buddha himself in a sutra called *Anapanasati Sutra, The Sutra on Mindful Breathing*. "Breathing in, I calm the mental formations in me. Breathing out, I let go." I let go of my anger. I calm my anger, I calm my worries, I calm my jealousy. And I let go of my anger, I let go of my jealousy. I think that adults have to practice together with the children. Every time the child is angry then her mother or her father should take her hand and invite her to practice. "Calm, ease."

"Let us, together, practice calming and easing. 'Breathing in, I calm myself. Breathing out, I let go'" at least three times and you will feel much better.

You can begin right away with "Calm, ease" or you might begin in a classical way with "In, out" first and then "Deep, slow" and then "Calm, ease." Either way is good. The Buddha dharma is wonderful. The moment you take the dharma up and practice you begin to feel better right away. And as you continue the practice, your quality of being always continues to improve.

I propose to you to practice three times 'Calm, ease' but no one prevents you from practicing more than that: four times, five times, six times, if you like it. I think you will like it because it makes you suffer less. And if you can practice eight times, ten times, you'll feel much better. "Calm, ease."

Then you'll come to the fourth pebble, and that is "Smile, release. Smile, release." "Breathing in, I smile." You can smile now. You may feel it is very difficult to smile, too difficult to smile. But after having practiced three or four times you feel that you are able to smile. And if you can smile, you'll feel a lot better. You may protest, "Thay, I have

no joy in me, why do you want me to smile? That's not natural." Many people ask me like that, not only children, but grownup people. They protest, "Thay, I have no joy in me. I cannot force myself to smile, it would not be true, it would not be natural."

I always say that a smile can be a practice, a kind of yoga practice. Yoga of the mouth: you just smile even if you don't feel joy and you'll see after you smile that you'll feel differently. Sometimes the mind takes the initiative and sometimes you have to allow the body to take the initiative.

Sometimes the spirit leads, and sometimes the body can lead. This is why when you have joy, you naturally smile. But sometimes you can allow the smile to go first. You try to smile and suddenly you feel that you don't suffer that much any more. So don't discriminate against the body. The body also can be a leader, not only the spirit. I propose that you try this when you wake up during the night. It's totally dark. Breath in and smile, and you'll see. Smile to life. You are alive, you smile. This is not a diplomatic smile, because no one sees you smiling. Yet the smile is a smile of enlightenment, of joy—the joy you feel of being alive.

So smiling is a practice, a yoga practice. Don't say, "I have no joy, why do I have to smile?" Because when you have joy and you smile, that is not practice, that's very natural. When you don't have joy and you smile, that is a real practice. You know there are something like 300 muscles, small and big on your face. Every time we get very angry or worried all these muscles are very tight. When people look at you with that tension on your face, they don't see you like a flower. People are afraid of you when all the muscles on your face are tense like that. You look more like a bomb than a flower. But if you know how to smile, in just one second, all these muscles are relaxed and your face looks like a flower again. It's wonderful.

So we have to learn to smile and then we'll look presentable right away. Look into the mirror and practice, and you'll see that the practice of the smile is very important. It brings relaxation and you can let go. You feel that you are released from the grip of the anger, of the despair.

[Bell]

On my right, there are already four pebbles. Now I'd like to practice the fifth pebble. This is the most wonderful practice. The fifth pebble can bring you a lot of joy, a lot of enlightenment, a lot of delight. That is "Present moment, wonderful moment. Present moment, wonderful moment."

This is a very deep teaching of the Buddha. The Buddha said that it is possible to live happily right here and right now. We don't have to go to the future. We don't have to go elsewhere to be happy. We can be happy right here and right now. You don't need more conditions to be happy, you have enough conditions to be happy right here and right now. If we know how to be ourselves and to look inside and around ourselves, we see that we have had enough conditions to be happy. That is the practice of living happily in the present moment.

When you breathe in, you feel that you are alive. Life is available to you, now: the blue sky, the white cloud, the green vegetation, the birds singing. Plum Village is here. Many friends are here. Your daddy is still alive, your mommy is with you, your brother is there, your sister is there. You have strong feet. You can run. You have eyes that can help you to see everything. There are many conditions for your happiness, you don't need anything else, you can be happy right away. You stop running. That is the practice. Because there are people who run all of their lives; they run because they think that happiness is not possible in the here and the now.

So this is a wonderful teaching of the Buddha. You breath in and you say "Present moment." It means, "I establish myself in the present moment. I don't run any more." This is the practice of *samata*, stopping. Stop running. I am wonderful like this in my sitting position or my walking position or even in my lying down position. It's wonderful like that, I don't need to run any more. Stopping. Present moment, wonderful moment. It's wonderful that you are alive.

To be alive, that is a miracle. Imagine a person who is already dead. You might not have seen a dead person but maybe you have seen a dead bird, a dead animal. No matter what you do, the animal cannot come back to life. Whatever you do, whatever you say, the animal is not able to listen, to hear. A dead person is also like that. She lies on the bed and no matter what you do, you cannot revive her. You cannot bring her into life again. You cry, you beat your chest, you pull your hair. But that person is already dead.

So, when you look at yourself, you see you are still alive. You see the person you love is still alive. That is wonderful. You have to wake up to that fact. The teaching of the Buddha is the teaching of waking up, waking up to see that all these wonderful things are still available. So you stop running, you establish yourself in the present moment. "Breathing in, I am in the here and in the now. Present moment. Breathing out, I feel this is a wonderful, wonderful moment."

The Buddha said life is available only in the present moment. The past is gone, the future is not yet here, you have only one moment to be alive. That is the present moment. So simple and so deep. You have an appointment with life. You should not miss that appointment. Life is most precious. You've got to meet her, you've got to be with her. And you know something, life is only available in the here and the now, in the present moment. So don't miss your appointment with life. Don't miss the present moment. That is why

the fifth practice is wonderful. If you practice like that, you get a lot of joy whether you are on your cushion or on your bed or in the position of walking meditation. “Present moment, wonderful moment.”

From A Dharma Talk by Thich Nhat Hanh, July 30th, 1996

The Art of Healing Ourselves

Please, when you breathe in, do not make an effort of breathing in. You just allow yourself to breathe in. Even if you don't breathe in it will breathe in by itself. So don't say, “My breath, come, so that I tell you how to do.” Don't try to force anything, don't try to intervene, just allow the breathing in to take place. What you have to do is be aware of the fact that the breathing in is taking place. And you have more chance to enjoy your in-breath. Don't struggle with your breath, that is what I recommend. Realize that your in breath is a wonder. When someone is dead, no matter what we do, the person will not breathe in again. So we are breathing in, that is a wonderful thing. Breathing in I know I'm alive, it's a miracle. We have to enjoy our in-breath. There are many ways to enjoy your in-breath. We want you to tell us how you enjoy your in-breath, whether in a sitting position or in a walking position. But if you don't enjoy breathing in, breathing out, you don't do it right.

This is the first recommendation on breathing that the Buddha made. When breathing in, I know this is the in-breath. When breathing out, I know this is the out-breath. When the in-breath is long, I know it is long. When it is short, I know it is short. Just recognition, mere recognition, simple recognition of the presence of the in-breath and out-breath. When you do that, suddenly you become entirely present. What a miracle, because to meditate means to be there. To be there with yourself, to be there with your in-breath.

So you now understand the two sentences, “Breathing in, I know I am breathing in. Breathing out, I know I am breathing out.” And a few minutes later, “Breathing in I know my in-breath has become deep. Breathing out, I know my out-breath has become slow.” That is not an

effort to make the in-breath deeper or the out-breath slower. That is only a recognition of the fact. These instructions will be used for our walking meditation right after the Dharma talk. After having followed your in-breath and out-breath for a few minutes you will notice that your in-breath and out-breath now have a much better quality, because the image of mindfulness, when touching anything, increases the quality of that thing. The Buddha when he touches something, reveals and increases the quality of being of that thing. Mindfulness is the Buddha, therefore it plays that role.

When you look at the full moon, and if you are mindful, "Breathing in I see the full moon, breathing out I smile at the full moon," suddenly the full moon reveals itself to you maybe one hundred times more clearly. It's more beautiful, it's clearer, it's more enjoyable. Why? Because the moon has been touched by mindfulness. So when you touch your in-breath and out-breath with your mindfulness, your in-breath becomes more harmonious, more gentle, deeper, slower, and so does your out-breath. Now you enjoy in-breathing and out-breathing. Naturally your breathing becomes more enjoyable, the quality of your breathing increases. So "In/Out" is for the beginning. [Thây writes on blackboard.] Then "Deep/Slow" is the next step: "Breathing in, I know that my in breath has become deep and I enjoy it. Breathing out, I see that my out-breath has become slow and I enjoy it."

During that time you have stopped, you have allowed your body and your mind to rest. Even if you are walking, you are resting. If you are sitting, you are resting. You are not struggling anymore, on your cushion, or walking. Then later on you will try this. These words are only to help you to recognize what is happening. "Calm/Ease: Breathing in I feel the calm in me."

This is not autosuggestion, because if you have enjoyed In/Out and Deep/Slow, calm is something that is established. Resting. If you

touched your calm, your calm rose. It's like when you touched the moon. “Breathing out, I feel ease in me.” I don't suffer anymore. I will not make it hard anymore. Don't be too hard on yourself. Allow yourself to be at ease with yourself. Don't struggle. All of these can be done even if lots of suffering is still in your body and in your soul. Doing this, we are taking care of them. We are not trying to escape the pain in us. We are giving our body and our consciousness a rest.

“Smile/Release: Breathing in I smile.” In Plum Village we speak about “mouth yoga,” you just try to smile and then you realize the relaxation of the many hundreds of muscles on your face. According to the law of cause and effect when you have joy you smile. Or when you smile you release all the tension on your face. The first case is cause and effect. The second case is also cause and effect. So why do you have to wait for joy to take the initiative? Why don't you allow your mouth to take the initiative? Do you practice some kind of discrimination against your body? You know that the moment when you sit down and rest you feel much better in your soul. So the body can always take the initiative if you allow it to be. And to practice meditation, you don't practice it only with your mind, but also with your body. The Buddha said it is possible to touch nirvana with your body.

“Breathing in, I smile,” because there is calm, ease, and the joy of being rested. And “breathing out, I release.” I release because there is in me a tendency to continue to run, to struggle. Even in my dream I continue to struggle—that is a habit energy of more than three, four thousand years. I recognize it. It has been transmitted to me by many generations of ancestors. So now I'm practicing for them. If I can stop and release, then all my ancestors in me get liberated. You are doing it for everyone, because you are not a self. And you are doing it out of love.

The last is, “Present moment/Wonderful moment.” To be walking on earth and realizing that you are alive, dwelling in the present moment. You see, to be alive and to be walking on earth is already a miracle. Because you have been running to look for your happiness, you may not know that happiness is available in the here, and the now. Conditions for your happiness may be more than enough in the here and the now. That is the result of the practice of stopping—stopping to realize that you are wonderful like this. You can be happy right now.

“Present moment,” because that is the only moment for us to live. If you miss the present moment, you miss your appointment with life. The Buddha said life is available only in the present moment. “Wonderful moment,” that is life that you touch. Suddenly happiness becomes possible. Being alive, walking with the Sangha, touching the blue sky, the earth, breathing in and out freely, allowing us to rest body and consciousness is already a wonderful thing.

Do we need a deeper practice? A more difficult practice? More complicated kind of practice? I don't think so. Because for those of us who have practiced forty, fifty years already, we continue to practice like this or something similar to this, and we always get more peace and joy and happiness. Our insight always continues to grow. You don't have to look for an “intensive” course of meditation, or a “high” level of meditation, or “intensive” or “high” practice. Lin-Chi, the founder of the Rinzai school of meditation, said, “The miracle is not to walk on fire or on thin air, the miracle is to walk on earth.” If mindfulness is there, you are performing the miracle of being alive in each moment.

On his gatha

In - Out
Flower - Fresh
Mountain - Solid
Water - Reflecting
Space - Free

From "Peace is Every Step; An Evening with Thich Nhat Hahn", Berkeley, California, April, 1991.

In Out , Flower Fresh , Mountain Solid , Space Free

"Dear friends, I would like to invite you to practice breathing with me. I have a new gatha for the practice of breathing, so let us learn together. (You cannot hear?) Let us learn together, an excercise on breathing. (you hear me?-good.)

"Breathing in, I know I am breathing in, breathing out,
I know that I am breathing out."

When we breathe in, we just focus our attention on our in breath, and nothing else. And when we breathe out, we just focus our attention on our out breath, and nothing else.

And then after that we may like to try this: "Breathing in, I see myself as a flower, breathing out, I feel fresh."

And we can use the word "flower" as we breathe in, and we use the word "fresh" as we breathe out.

If you look at children, they look very much like flowers. And all of us were born as flowers, but because we have not taken care of ourselves well, that is why sometimes our flower is tired, we wither a little bit. And breathing in like that is to refresh our flower, to make it beautiful again.

So, "Breathing in, I see myself as a flower, breathing out, I feel fresh."

I see the human body as a flower too. Our eyes, they look like rose petals. Our lips can be a very beautiful flower, our hands, beautiful flowers.

"Breathing in I see myself as a flower, breathing out,
I feel fresh."

And then we might like to switch to the third breath:
"Breathing in, I see myself as a mountain, a mountain,
breathing out, I feel solid."

If you practice Buddhist meditation, you like to sit in the lotus position, and that is a very beautiful position of the human body. And you feel very solid, like a mountain, especially when you practice breathing in that position.

A mountain is not swayed by the wind. And human beings, if they don't know how to sit, to breathe, they may be swayed back and forth by their emotions, strong emotions, like winds. And practicing this, we become more solid, like a mountain.

There are people who do not know how to handle their emotions, especially the big emotions. And when they are overwhelmed by these emotions they don't know what to do, and sometimes they have to commit suicide. They do not know

that you are more than your emotions. So when there is a strong emotion, you just breathe, in and out, and become a mountain. And be aware that we are more, much more than one emotion. And we will overcome that emotion.

"Breathing in, I see myself as a mountain, breathing out, I feel solid."

And then the next one is water: "Breathing in, I see myself as still waters..."

Let us imagine a pond on the highland, very still. The water is so limpid and still that it reflects truthfully the color of the sky, and also the shapes of the mountains. And if you look into the water, you see your face, not distorted.

When we are still like that, we will reflect reality as it is. We will have right perceptions. If you are agitated, and then we cannot reflect things as they are.

Therefore, "Breathing in, I make myself still, like a pond on a mountain, and, breathing out, I reflect things as they are." So we use the words "water", "reflecting".

Many times when we listen to other people, we don't really listen. We listen to our prejudices, we listen to our emotion, and therefore we miss the point that the people want to make. It is because we are not still enough, clear enough. That is why we have a wrong perception concerning what is going on. So this excercise is quite important.

And the last one is "space", and "free", space inside me and space around me, because we do need space in order to be happy.

A flower does need space in order to be happy. If you want to arrange flowers, you know that each flower needs space around her. So if you arrange flowers well, you don't need a lot of flowers. Maybe you need 1, or 2, or 3, and you give each flower a lot of space. And we human beings, we are like that too, we need space in order to be happy. And not only space outside, but space inside.

If we are so full of emotions, so full of anger and hatred, and fear, and then we don't have enough space within us, we cannot be happy. Therefore the practice is to let go, in order to have space inside, and around. And if we love each other we should give each other enough space inside and also outside, so that that person, these people, will flower.

"Breathing in, I see myself as space, breathing out, I feel free." Freedom is the base of happiness.

So these exercises you might practice like this:

In - out
flower - fresh
mountain - solid
water - reflecting
space - free

And then, if you want, you just practice one, like "flower, fresh", for 3 times, or, "mountain, solid", for three times. And we shall do that every time we hear the bell, we practice peace as a community, as a sangha. Let us try. And enjoy your breathing.

(Bell)

I would like to say one more thing concerning the last exercise, "space", "freedom". I would like to tell you a story that I saw in the sutras. I think it is in the Samuta Nikaya. One day the Buddah was sitting with a number of monks, in the wood, near the city of Vajali. Suddenly one person came by. He looked very unhappy. He was a farmer.

He asked the Buddha whether he had seen his cows, passing by. The Buddha asked, "What cows?" He said that he had twelve cows, and they have all run away. "Monk, I am the most unhappy person on earth. I think I am going to die. I only have twelve cows, and they have gone, all of them.

And I also have two pieces of land where I cultivate sesame seed plants, and they are all eaten up by insects. So I think I will die." The Buddha said he didn't see any cows, and he suggested that the farmer go in the other direction in order to look for his cows.

And after the farmer was gone, the Buddha turned to his monks and said this: "Monks, you are very lucky, you don't have any cows."

So, if we have any cows, either inside and outside, let them go. Our happiness, our freedom, our peace depends very much on our capacity to release our cows.

(Bell)

I have said that every time we are overwhelmed by the emotions, we can hardly be ourselves. We are like a tree, when there are strong winds blowing. The top of the tree sways very much. And we have the impression, if we look at the top of the

tree, that the tree is not very solid. It can be broken. But if we go down, to the trunk of the tree, and if you are more aware of the roots of the trees, deep in the soil, you will have another feeling, the tree is much more solid.

So we are a kind of tree. Our emotions are on this level, but if we know how to bring our attention to this level, the level of our navel, and then this is the trunk of the tree. So every time you are possessed by one strong emotion, try to hold your attention here, a little bit below the navel, and breathe according to this gatha; "in, out", "mountain, solid", and so on. And you will find that you are much more solid.

Pay attention to the movement of your abdomen. Help your abdomen to do the work of pumping the air, and after a few minutes you'll feel much better. So this method may save your life in the future. If you know how to practice it in your daily life, and when you face a danger, a big danger, you will know how to breathe in and out in order to regain your control, and your solidity.

Of course, when we practice like this there is something present in us. That something is called mindfulness. Mindfulness is the capacity to be there, in the present moment; solid, calmer, more lucid. And that is the fruit of the practice of mindfulness. You need only to practice breathing in and out like that in order for mindfulness to be present. And mindfulness will bring you many good things; solidity, freshness, calmness, clearsightedness, and freedom.

When you breathe in and out, and release things, you become a freer person. And this practice should be done everyday, by yourself, and by the people you love, and by the community.

We practice as an individual, and we practice as a community. This is the practice of peace.

Mindfulness has the capacity of transforming. It can transform a neutral feeling into a wonderful, pleasant feeling. When you look at the sky, the blue sky with mindfulness, the sky becomes more beautiful.

"Breathing in, I am aware of the blue sky, breathing out,
I feel so happy."

When you contemplate a beautiful sunset, and if you know how to breathe in and out with mindfulness, you enjoy the beautiful sunset much more than if you are possessed by the past or future, or by a feeling like anger, or fear.

When you contemplate a flower in mindfulness, the flower will reveal herself to you deeply. When you eat a tangerine in mindfulness, the tangerine will reveal itself to you deeply. If you breathe in and out, and look deeply at the tangerine, you will see that the whole cosmos has come together in order to make the tangerine possible. Looking deeply at the tangerine we can see the sunshine, the rain, the earth, and many more things. And looking at the tangerine like that, and seeing the tangerine like that, you will eat it in a very different way. Your encounter with the tangerine will be very deep.

When you look at the tangerine with your mindfulness, the tangerine will become a very wonderful thing. And you, the one who eats the tangerine, will become a wonderful person; awake, deep, solid. And the encounter between you and the tangerine will be a deep one. Life is present in that moment.

The same thing is true when you hold your baby. Your child is coming like a flower, smiling, sparkling eyes, and if you are not there, well, you sit there, but you are not really there, your mind is on something else, then you will not be available to your child. But if you know how to breathe in and out, and go back to the present moment, you receive the child deeply. At that moment you become available to him, you open your arms, and you hug your child.

"Breathing in, my child is in my arms, breathing out, I feel happy." And if you feel happy, the child will feel happy at the same time.

So mindfulness, present, will improve the situation, will transform the situation, will reveal to you the marvel, the wonders of life that are in you and around you.

Suppose you touch your eyes and breathe in,

"Breathing in, I am aware of my eyes, breathing out, I smile to my eyes."

And then your eyes will reveal themselves to you as wonderful things. You know of course that your eyes are very important. You need only to open them in order to see the blue sky, the beautiful trees, your beloved ones.

And, you know that the people who cannot see things, they suffer. They say that if they can recover their eyesight they would be like in paradise. It means that all of us who have eyes, we are in paradise, but we are not aware of that.

So breathing in and out may bring us to paradise. We need only to open our eyes in order to see all kinds of forms and

colors. And we enter into the pure land, the land of bliss, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God.

One time in a church, I said something like this: "You don't have to die in order to enter the kingdom of God, in fact you have to be alive in order to do so."

The kingdom of God is available only in the present moment. So breathe in and out, smile, and you see that the kingdom of God, the kingdom of peace and happiness, is available to you. Just make one step and enter the kingdom of God with mindfulness.

And if we know how to get in touch with the refreshing, healing things in us, like our eyes, like the beautiful sunset, a little child, the beautiful rivers, the air we breathe, well, we will get nourished by these things, and peace is available in the present moment to some extent. And we have to profit from it.

So the first function of mindfulness is to help you to get in touch with the refreshing and healing elements in you and around you so that you may be nourished. And that is the practice of peace itself. Because if you are not healthy, you are not peaceful, you cannot do anything to help anyone, including your beloved ones.

I think a tree can look happy. When you look at a tree you can see if a tree is happy or not. A tree is happy when it is a real tree; solid, fresh. And we human beings, we are like that too. If we practice we become more fresh, more solid, truly a human being, and then we are happy. And before we do anything in order to help other people, we already help. I think that the best thing that a tree can do for us is to be a tree, to be a real

tree, a healthy, happy tree. Because if a tree is less than a tree, then all of us will be in trouble.

The same thing is true with a human being. So a human being should be a real, a true human being. And if a human being is less than a human being, then the whole cosmos will suffer, will be in trouble. And that is why we need to be ourselves; refreshing, solid, peaceful.

(Bell)

When we are not happy, we try to escape ourselves. We try to think that our happiness is in the future, and that we should run to the future. But we know that running to the future means to deny the present moment. But life can only be found in the present moment. If you do not want to miss your appointment with life, you have to go back to the present moment. Everything you look for, peace, happiness, calm, buddha, kingdom of God, they are all in the present moment.

If you are running to the future it means that you are not happy in the present moment. If someone takes refuge in the drugs and alcohol, it means that she is not happy, he is not happy and peaceful. And if someone is taking refuge in action, even peace action, he is not peaceful and happy.

If someone is doing a lot of things to protect the environment, to protest the war, it may be that that someone is not happy, and they take refuge in the action in order to forget their unhappiness. But if they do things like that, they do things in that situation, they will not help, because their happiness, their solidity should be the base for the action. So action should be

based on non-action, it means based on being. And the quality of our being determines the quality of our action. And therefore, let us not take refuge in action in order to escape being.

From No Death, No Fear

On the Gatha

I have arrived,
I am home
In the here,
In the now
I am solid,
I am free
In the ultimate,
I dwell

The Only Moment We Can Be Alive

We cannot enjoy life if we spend a lot of time worrying about what happened yesterday and what will happen tomorrow. We worry about tomorrow because we are afraid. If we are afraid all the time, we cannot appreciate that we are alive and can be happy now.

In our daily life, we tend to believe that happiness is only possible in the future. We are always looking for better things, the right conditions to make us happy. We run away from what is happening right in front of us. We try to find things that make us feel more solid, more safe and secure. But we are afraid all the time of what the future will bring. We are afraid we'll lose our jobs, our possessions, the people around us whom we love. So we wait for the magical moment- sometime in the future- when everything will be as we like, as we want it to be.

But life is available only in the present moment. The Buddha said, "It is possible to live happily in the present moment. It is the only moment we have."

When you come back to the here and the now, you will recognize the many conditions of happiness that already exist. The practice of mindfulness is the practice of coming back to the here and the now to be in touch deeply with ourselves, with life. We have to train ourselves in order to do this. Even if we are very intelligent and we understand it right away, we still have to train ourselves to live this way. We have to train ourselves to recognize that the conditions for happiness are already here.

True Home

Our true home is in the here and the now. The past is already gone and the future is not yet here. "I have arrived, I am home, in the here, in the now." This is our practice.

You can recite this gatha, or poem, during walking meditation or sitting meditation. You can practice this poem when you drive to your office. You may not have arrived at your office, but even while driving you have already arrived at your true home, the present moment. And when you arrive at your office, this is also your true home. When you are in your office, you are also in the here and the now.

Just practicing the first line of the poem "I have arrived, I am home" can make you very happy. Whether you are sitting, whether you are walking, whether you are watering the vegetables in the garden, or whether you are feeding your child, it is always possible to practice "I have arrived, I am home." I am not running anymore; I have run all my life; now I am determined to stop and to really live my life.

What Are You Waiting For? The French have a song called What are you waiting for to be happy?. When I practice breathing in and I say, "I have arrived," that is an achievement. Now I am fUlly present, one

hundred percent alive. The present moment has become my true home.

When I breathe out I say, "I am home." If you do not feel you are home, you will continue to run. And you will continue to be afraid. But if you feel you are already home, then you do not need to run anymore. This is the secret of the practice. When we live in the present moment, it is possible to live in true happiness.

Appreciating Earth

For many years I have told this story. Suppose two astronauts go to the moon. When they arrive, they have an accident and find out that they have only enough oxygen for two days. There is no hope of someone coming from Earth in time to rescue them. They have only two days to live. If you asked them at that moment, "What is your deepest wish?" they would answer, "To be back home walking on the beautiful planet Earth." That would be enough for them; they would not want anything else. They would not want to be the head of a large corporation, a big celebrity or president of the United States. They would not want anything except to be back on Earth-to be walking on Earth, enjoying every step, listening to the sounds of nature and holding the hand of their beloved while contemplating the moon.

We should live every day like people who have just been rescued from the moon. We are on Earth now, and we need to enjoy walking on this precious, beautiful planet. The Zen master Lin Chi said, "The miracle is not to walk on water but to walk on the Earth." I cherish that teaching. I enjoy just walking, even in busy places like airports and railway stations. In walking like that, with each step caressing our Mother Earth, we can inspire other people to do the same. We can enjoy every minute of our lives.

* * *

If you want to know where God, the Buddhas and all the great beings live, I can tell you. Here is their address: in the here and now. It has everything you need, including the zip code.

If you can breathe in and out and walk in the spirit of "I have arrived, I am home, in the here, in the now," then you will notice that you are becoming more solid and more free immediately. You have established yourself in the present moment, at your true address. Nothing can push you to run anymore, or make you so afraid. You are free from worrying about the past. You are not stuck, thinking about what has not happened yet and what you cannot control. You are free from guilt concerning the past and you are free from your worries about the future.

Only a free person can be a happy person. The amount of happiness that you have depends on the amount of freedom that you have in your heart. Freedom here is not political freedom. Freedom here is freedom from regret, freedom from fear, from anxiety and sorrow. "I have arrived, I am home, in the here, in the now."

"I am solid, I am free." This is what you feel, what you become, when you arrive in the here and now. You're not just telling yourself this- you will see it; you will feel it. And when you do, you will be at peace. You will experience nirvana, or the kingdom of God, or whatever you may like to call it. Even if you are not caught by a lot of worries, if you are not solid and free, how can you be happy? To cultivate solidity and freedom in the present moment is the greatest gift we can give ourselves.

Dwelling in the Ultimate

"In the ultimate I dwell." The ultimate is the foundation of our being, the ground of being. The ultimate, or God, or the divine, is not separate from us. We are in it all the time. It is not somewhere up

there beyond the sky. But we have to live in our true home in order to dwell in the ultimate, in order to live in the ultimate.

It is like the wave and water. If we look into a wave, we see that a wave can have a beginning and an end. A wave can be high or low. A wave can be like other waves, or it can be different. But the wave is always made of water. Water is the foundation of the wave. A wave is a wave, but it is also water. The wave may have a beginning and an end, it may be big or small, but with water there is no beginning, no end, no up, no down, no this, no that. When the wave realizes and understands this, it is free from the fear of beginning and end, up and down, big and small, this and that.

In the historical dimension, we have time and space, and pairs of opposites: right and wrong, young and old, coming and going, pure and impure. We look forward to beginning and we are afraid of ending. But the ultimate dimension does not have any of these things. There is no beginning or end, no before or after. The ultimate is the ground that makes the historical dimension possible. It is the original, continuing source of being. It is nirvana. It is the kingdom of God.

Our foundation is nirvana, the ultimate reality. You can call it God or the kingdom of God. This is the water in which we live. You are a wave, but at the same time you are also water. You have a historical dimension and you also have an ultimate dimension. If we understand that our true nature is of no birth, no death, no coming, no going, then our fear will depart and our pain and suffering will vanish.

A wave does not have to die in order to become water. She is water right here and now. We also do not have to die in order to enter the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is our very foundation here and now. Our deepest practice is to see and touch the ultimate

dimension in ourselves every day, the reality of no birth and no death. Only this practice can remove our fear and suffering entirely. Rather than saying, "In the ultimate I dwell," you may like to say, "In the kingdom of God I dwell" or "In the Buddha land I dwell."

Releasing Sorrow

Suppose someone was able to transport you by jet to the kingdom of God or the Pure Land of the Buddha. When you arrived, how would you walk? In such a beautiful place, would you walk under pressure, running and anxious like we do so much of the time? Or would you enjoy every moment of being in paradise? In the kingdom of God, or the Pure Land, people are free and they enjoy every moment. So they do not walk like we do.

The Pure Land is not somewhere else; it is right here, in the present. It is in every cell of our bodies. When we run away from the present, we destroy the kingdom of God. But if we know how to free ourselves from our habit energy of running, then we will have peace and freedom and we will all walk like a Buddha in paradise.

What we carry with us determines in which dimension we dwell. If you carry a lot of sorrow, fear and craving with you, then wherever you go you will always touch the world of suffering and hell. If you carry with you compassion, understanding and freedom, then wherever you go you will touch the ultimate dimension, the kingdom of God.

Wherever the practitioner goes, she knows she is touching the kingdom of God under her feet. There is not one day when I do not walk in the kingdom of God. Because I practice freedom and compassion wherever I go, my feet touch the kingdom of God, the ultimate dimension everywhere. If we cultivate this kind of touching,

then the important elements of solidity and freedom will be available to us twenty-four hours every day.

"I have arrived, I am home." The home of the wave is water. It's right there. She does not have to travel thousands of miles in order to arrive at her true home. It's so simple and so powerful. I would like to invite you to memorize this little poem and to practice and remember it many times a day. In this way you will touch the ultimate dimension and always remember your true home.

Walking Meditation

Wherever we walk, we can practice meditation. This means that we know that we are walking. We walk just for walking. We walk with freedom and solidity, no longer in a hurry. We are present with each step. And when we wish to talk we stop our movement and give our full attention to the other person, to our words and to listening.

Walking in this way should not be a privilege. We should be able to do it in every moment. Look around and see how vast life is, the trees, the white clouds, the limitless sky. Listen to the birds. Feel the fresh breeze. Life is all around and we are alive and healthy and capable of walking in peace.

Let us walk as a free person and feel our steps get lighter. Let us enjoy every step we make. Each step is nourishing and healing. As we walk, imprint our gratitude and our love on the earth.

We may like to use a gatha as we walk. Taking two or three steps for each in-breath and each out-breath,

Breathing in “I have arrived”; Breathing out “I am home”
Breathing in “In the here”; Breathing out “In the now”
Breathing in “I am solid”; Breathing out “I am free”
Breathing in “In the ultimate”; Breathing out “I dwell”

Thay - Instructions on Walking Meditation, April, 1989

When you practice kin-hin, slow walking meditation in the hall, you do like that, breathing in, you make a step.

And each step should bring you happiness, otherwise it would not be worth practicing. You practice the gatha, 'In, out,in, out,' and so on. And these steps are very healing. It has the healing power. So enjoy your walking in the meditation hall.

If you have 100 steps to make, these 100 steps are 100 gems. And all of them have to bring peace and happiness to you. All of them have the power to bring healing to you.

And the same thing can be applied when we practice walking meditation outside, only we walk more quickly, because if we go slow like this in the park, people will think it is too queer. So instead of making one breath, one word, instead of making 'in, out', you can do like this- 'in, in, out, out',- it means one breath may be measured by two steps.

And if your lungs want three, you give them three, 'in, in, in, out, out, out', it means my in breath goes with three steps, and my out breath goes with three steps.

And maybe later, when I climb the slope of the hill, my lungs will say that two are enough. So you say, 'in, in, out, out'. So listen to the needs of your lungs, and give them the exact number of steps they need. And you can enjoy repeating that gatha several times before you go back to 'in, in, out, out'.

And practicing walking meditation you combine the breathing and your steps, because between the steps and the breath there is the

counting. The counting, 'one, two', 'one, two'. So the counting is an element that combines the breath and the step into one, and you only have one object of concentration.

And walk as if you breathe with your own feet. Concentrate your mind on the sole of your feet. And walk as if you kiss the earth with your feet. All the pleasant feeling should come through the sole of your feet. Even though you breathe here, the concentration may be on the sole of your feet. And if you see something too beautiful to neglect, please feel free to stop and to contemplate it, to be in touch.

You stop, but let people continue, but with the condition that you should continue the breathing.

'Breathing in, the pine is so beautiful,
breathing out, so green,
Breathing in, I am the pine,
breathing out, the pine is me'

You create your own gathas when you breathe like that, otherwise the pine tree will vanish and the thinking will be resettled here. So, mindful breathing is to nourish the mindfulness of what is in the present moment. And that is the technique, the secret of success.

Inside here, we just take one breath, one step. And you know that the wooden floor, it is as wonderful as the grass outside. It is the sunshine that has made the floor. It is the cloud that brings the water to the trees that grow. So when you walk on the wooden floor you may have the feeling that you are walking on the rain, on the clouds, on the sunshine. It depends on how deep is your power of concentration, your mindfulness. The deeper the mindfulness is the more pleasant the contact between you and the floor will be. So mindfulness, awareness, is the base of your peace and your happiness.

It's like when you have a toothache, you got enlightened- you know that not having a toothache is a wonderful thing. Right? But that enlightenment you don't keep very long. When you do not have a toothache, you don't feel very happy. Because you don't nourish the mindfulness that not having a toothache is a wonderful thing.

We shall go out and practice, and enjoy our walking, walking, but not arriving. We don't need to arrive.

From The Miracle of Mindfulness, by Thich Nhat Hanh

The Pebble

Why should you meditate? First of all, because each of us needs to realize total rest. Even a night of sleep doesn't provide total rest. Twisting and turning, the facial muscles tense, all the while dreaming- hardly rest! Nor is lying down rest when you still feel restless and twist and turn. Lying on your back, with your arms and legs straight but not stiff, your head unsupported by a pillow- this is a good position to practice breathing and to relax all the muscles; but this way it is also easier to fall asleep. You cannot go as far in meditation lying down as by sitting. It is possible to find total rest in a sitting position, and in turn to advance deeper in meditation in order to resolve the worries and troubles that upset and block your consciousness.

Among our workers in Vietnam there are many who can sit in the lotus position, the left foot placed on the right thigh and the right foot placed on the left thigh. Others can sit in the half lotus, the left foot placed on the right thigh, or the right foot placed on the left thigh. In our meditation class in Paris, there are people who do not feel comfortable in either of the above two positions and so I have shown them how to sit in the Japanese manner, the knees bent, resting on their two legs. By placing a pillow beneath one's feet, it is possible to sit that way for more than an hour and a half. Even so, anyone can learn to sit in the half lotus, though at the beginning it may be somewhat painful. But after a few weeks of practice, the position gradually becomes quite comfortable. During the initial period, when the pain can be bothersome, alternate the position of the legs or change to another sitting position. If one sits in the lotus or half-lotus position, it is necessary to use a cushion to sit on so that both knees touch the floor. The three points of bodily contact with the floor created by this position provide an extremely stable position.

Keep your back straight. This is very important. The neck and head should be aligned with the spinal column; they should be straight but not stiff or wood-like. Keep your eyes focused a yard or two in front of you. If you can, maintain a half smile.

Now begin to follow your breath and to relax all of your muscles. Concentrate on keeping your spinal column straight and on following your breath. As for everything else, let it go. Let go of everything. If you want to relax the worry-tightened muscles in your face, let the half smile come to your face. As the half smile appears, all the facial muscles begin to relax. The longer the half smile is maintained, the better. It is the same smile you see on the face of the Buddha.

Place your left hand, palm side up, in your right palm. Let all the muscles in your hands, fingers, arms, and legs relax. Let go of everything. Be like the water-plants which flow with the current, while beneath the surface of the water the riverbed remains motionless. Hold on to nothing but your breath and the half smile.

For beginners, it is better to sit no longer than 20 or 30 minutes. During that time, you can readily obtain total rest. The technique for obtaining this rest lies in two things-watching and letting go: watching your breath, and letting go of everything else. Release every muscle in your body. After about 15 minutes or so, it is possible to reach a deep quiet filled with inner peace and joy. Maintain this quiet and peace.

Some people look on meditation as a toil and want the time to pass quickly in order to rest afterwards. Such persons do not know how to sit yet. If you sit correctly, it is possible to find total relaxation and peace right in the position of sitting. Often it helps to meditate on the image of a pebble thrown into a river.

How is one helped by the image of the pebble? Sit down in whatever position suits you best, the half lotus or lotus, back straight, the half smile on your face. Breathe slowly and deeply, following each breath, becoming one with the breath. Then let go of everything. Imagine yourself as a pebble which has been thrown into a river. The pebble sinks through the water effortlessly. Detached from everything, it falls by the shortest distance possible, finally reaching the bottom, the point of perfect rest. You are like a pebble which has let itself fall into the river, letting go of everything. At the center of your being is your breath. You don't need to know the length of time it takes before reaching the point of complete rest on the bed of fine sand beneath the water. When you feel yourself resting like a pebble which has reached the riverbed, that is the point when you begin to find your own rest. You are no longer pushed or pulled by anything.

If you cannot find joy in peace in these very moments of sitting, then the future itself will only flow by as a river flows by, you will not be able to hold it back, you will be incapable of living the future when it has become the present. Joy and peace are the joy and peace possible in this very hour of sitting. If you cannot find it here, you won't find it anywhere. Don't chase after your thoughts as a shadow follows its object. Don't run after your thoughts. Find joy and peace in this very moment .

This is your own time. This spot where you sit is your own spot. It is on this very spot and in this very moment that you can become enlightened. You don't have to sit beneath a special tree in a distant land. Practice like this for a few months, and you will begin to know a profound and renewing delight. The ease of sitting depends on whether you practice mindfulness a little or a lot each day. And it depends on whether or not you sit regularly. Whenever possible, join with friends or relatives and organize an hour of sitting each night, say from 10 to 11. Whoever wishes could come to sit for a half hour, or even an entire hour.

From Understanding Our Mind, by Thich Nhat Hanh

pages 142 to 144

In sitting meditation, we make the effort to close the doors of our five sense gates (ayatanas) in order to concentrate our mind consciousness, to bring about an independently operating mind consciousness. When images and sounds try to invade us, we do our best not to become attached to them.

Dispersion is the third way our mind consciousness operates. In fact, it is our most frequent state of mind. We live in dispersion and forgetfulness much of the time. Our mind consciousness has the tendency to be scattered, unable to stop thinking, caught by the past and future, running in every direction. When our mind consciousness is in a state of dispersion, mindfulness is not present. We are not really alive. When we are thinking about one thing after another, when we are anxious, sad, suspicious, or imagining things, and there is no coordination of mind consciousness with the eye, ear, nose, tongue, or tactile consciousness, it is called "distracted mind consciousness." Mind consciousness is operating alone, in dispersion.

The Buddha described this type of mind consciousness as a monkey, grasping this branch and that, always changing, free-associating, jumping from thought to thought. Each of us has to recognize and embrace the monkey within ourselves with mindfulness. With mindful breathing, mindful walking, and so on, we can quiet the monkey and bring it to stillness. Mind consciousness can also be compared to a swarm of bees, buzzing around wildly and not concentrating in any one spot. Only when the queen is present will all of them gather together.

In Buddhist meditation, we practice concentration, bringing everything into sharp, clear focus. This practice is called one-

pointedness of mind (ekagrata). The object of our concentration- the queen bee around which our swarming thoughts can gather- may be our breathing, a leaf, a pebble, a flower, or the object of our meditative focus. In the practice, we are given methods to help us concentrate the energy of our mind consciousness, to not let it become distracted. This practice is like putting a spotlight on the object of our concentration, just as when a singer or dancer is performing on stage and the spotlight is focused only on her. We focus our minds intently on the object of our concentration. When we use a lens to focus sunlight on one point, its energy is concentrated so effectively that we can burn a hole in a piece of cloth. In the same way, we focus our mind consciousness on one point in order to get a breakthrough.

Mindfulness leads us to the fourth manner of operation of mind consciousness, concentration. To solve a complex problem we have to concentrate our minds. We cannot afford to be in dispersion. With the practice of mindful breathing, we can end the state of dispersion and create a concentrated state of mind. When we use our breathing to bring all the energy of mind consciousness to one point, our confusion stops, and we are able to sustain the energy of our mind consciousness on one object. If we continue to practice, the energy of concentration will help us penetrate deeply into the heart of the object of our focus, and we will gain insight and understanding. Mind consciousness is then in a “state of concentration.” The stronger and the clearer our mindfulness, the more stable our concentration. Mindfulness always brings about concentration. When we are quite concentrated, it is called “operating alone in concentration.”

From Transformation and Healing

Mindfully Observing the Body

The First Establishment of Mindfulness is the body, which includes the breath, the positions of the body, the actions of the body, the parts of the body, the four elements of which the body is composed, and the dissolution of the body.

First Exercise - Conscious Breathing

He goes to the forest, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty room, sits down cross-legged in the lotus position, holds his body straight, and establishes mindfulness in front of him. He breathes in, aware that he is breathing in. He breathes out, aware that he is breathing out.

The first practice is the full awareness of breathing. When we breathe in, we know that we are breathing in. When we breathe out, we know that we are breathing out. Practicing in this way, our breathing becomes conscious breathing.

This exercise is simple, yet its effects are profound. To succeed, we must put the whole mind into our breathing and nowhere else. As we follow our in-breath, for example, we need to be watchful of distracting thoughts. As soon as a thought such as, "I forgot to turn off the light in the kitchen," arises, our breathing is no longer conscious breathing as we are thinking about something else. To succeed, our minds need to stay focused on our breathing for the entire length of each breath. As we breathe, our minds are one with our breath, and we become one with our breath. That is the meaning of "mindfulness of the body in the body."

Anyone can succeed in the practice of a single conscious breath. If we continue to breathe consciously for ten breaths, without our minds

going astray, then we have taken a valuable step on the path of practice. If we can practice conscious breathing for ten minutes, an important change will take place in us. How can a practice as simple as this bring about such important results and what are the results that it can bring about?

The first result of conscious breathing is returning to ourselves. In everyday life, we often get lost in forgetfulness. Our minds chases after thousands of things, and we rarely take the time to come back to ourselves. When we have been lost in forgetfulness like that for a long time, we lose touch with ourselves, and we feel alienated from ourselves. This phenomenon is very common in our times. Conscious breathing is a marvelous way to return to ourselves. When we are aware of our breath, we come back to ourselves as quick as a flash of lightning. Like a child who returns home after a long journey, we feel the warmth of our hearth, and we find ourselves again.
Coming back to ourselves is already a remarkable success on the path of the practice.

The second result of conscious breathing is that we come in contact with life in the present moment, the only moment when we can touch life. The life in us and around us is wonderful and abundant. If we are not free, we cannot be in contact with it, and we are not really living our lives. We should not be imprisoned by regrets about the past, anxieties for the future, or attachment and aversion in the present.

To breathe with full awareness is a miraculous way to untie the knots of regret and anxiety and to be in touch with life in the present moment. When we follow our breathing, we are already at ease, no longer dominated by our anxieties and longings. As we breathe consciously, our breath becomes more regular, and peace and joy arise and become more stable with every moment. Relying on our breathing, we come back to ourselves and are able to restore the

oneness of the body and mind. This integration allows us to be in real contact with what is happening in the present moment, which is the essence of life.

Second Exercise - Following the Breath

When he breathes in a long breath, he knows, 'I am breathing in a long breath.' When he breathes out a long breath, he knows, 'I am breathing out a long breath.' When he breathes in a short breath, he knows, 'I am breathing in a short breath.' When he breathes out a short breath, he knows, 'I am breathing out a short breath.'

The practitioner follows his breathing very closely and becomes one with his breathing for the entire length of the breath, not allowing any stray thought or idea to enter. This method is called "following the breath."

While the mind is following the breath, the mind *is* the breath and only the breath. In the process of the practice, our breathing naturally becomes more regular, harmonious, and calm, and our minds also become more regular, harmonious, and calm. This brings about feelings of joy, peace, and ease in the body. When the mind and the breathing become one, it is only a small step for the body and mind to become one also.

Third Exercise - Oneness of Body and Mind

'Breathing in, I am aware of my whole body. Breathing out, I am aware of my whole body.'

The third exercise is to bring body and mind into harmony. The element used to bring this about is the breath. In meditation practice, the distinction between body and mind dissolves, and we talk of the oneness of body and mind. In this exercise, the object of our mindfulness is no longer simply the breath, but the whole body itself, as it is unified with the breath.

Some practitioners and commentators, because they attach so much importance to the realization of the states of concentration (Pali: jhana; Sanskrit: dhyana) of the Four Form Jhanas and the Four Formless Jhanas, have explained the term "whole body" to mean the "whole breath body" and not the physical body of the practitioner.

The Patisambhida Magga, Vimutti Magga, and *Visuddhi Magga*, all well-known commentaries, tell us to concentrate on the tip of the nose, the place where the air enters and goes out from the body, as we breathe. We are not told to follow our breath into our bodies, because the commentators fear that our bodies may be too large an object for us to concentrate on. This kind of reasoning has led the commentators to interpret the word "body" (*kaya*) in the sutra as "breath body."

But as we read the sutra, we see that the practice of being mindful of the whole "breath body" was already dealt with in the second exercise: "Breathing in a long breath, he knows, 'I am breathing in a long breath.' Breathing out a short breath, he knows, 'I am breathing out a short breath.'" Why then do we need to repeat this exercise?

The first four exercises of *The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing (Anapanasati)* teach us to focus our attention on the body, so it is natural for the third exercise in *The Sutra on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness (Satipatthana)* also to focus on the full awareness of the physical body. Nowhere in either sutra are we taught to concentrate on the breath at the tip of the nose. Nowhere are we taught that we should *not* concentrate on the whole physical body.

In recent times, the Burmese meditation master Mahasi Sayadaw taught the method of being attentive to the inflation and contraction of the abdomen caused by the in-breath and the out-breath. Using this method, the practitioner can realize concentration easily, but it is not described by the Mahasi as a method of awareness of breathing. The basic reason for doing this practice, according to the Mahasi, is that understanding (*prajña*) arises naturally when there is concentration. Perhaps the reason Mahasi Sayadaw does not describe this method as a practice of awareness of breathing is because of traditional prejudice that conscious breathing should not follow the breath into the body and down into the abdomen.

Here it may be useful to say something about the purpose of concentration. Right Concentration (*samyak samadhi*), one stage of the Noble Eightfold Path, leads to an awareness and deep observation of the object of concentration and eventually to awakened understanding.

The Pali compound word *samatha-vipassana* (Sanskrit: *shamatha-vipashyana)* means "stopping-observing," "calming-illuminating," or "concentrating-understanding."

There are also states of concentration that encourage the practitioner to escape from the complexities of suffering and existence, rather than face them directly in order to transform them. These can be called "wrong concentration." The Four Form Jhanas and the Four Formless Jhanas are states of meditational concentration that the Buddha practiced with teachers such as Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputra, and he rejected them as not leading to liberation from suffering. These states of concentration probably found their way back into the sutras around two hundred years after the Buddha passed into mahaparinirvana. The results of these concentrations are to hide reality from the practitioner, so we can assume that they

should not be considered Right Concentration. To dwell in these concentrations for a duration of time for the sake of healing may be one thing, but to escape in them for a long time is not what the Buddha recommended.

In the third exercise, the practitioner uses her breathing to bring body and mind together as one, so the object of concentration is simultaneously body, mind, and breath. This condition, known as "oneness of body and mind," is one of total integration.

In our daily lives, we often find our minds and our bodies separated. The body may be here, while the mind is somewhere else, perhaps lost in the distant past or floating in a distant future. Through mindfulness, we can realize the oneness of body and mind, and we are able to restore the wholeness of ourselves. In this condition, every practice will take us back to the source, which is the oneness of body and mind, and we open to a real encounter with life.

When body and mind are one, the wounds in our hearts, minds, and bodies begin to heal. As long as there is separation between body and mind, these wounds cannot heal. During sitting meditation, the three elements of breath, body, and mind are calmed, and gradually they become one. When peace is established in one of the three elements, the other two will soon have peace also. For example, if the body is in a very stable position and all the muscles and the nervous system are relaxed, then the mind and breath are immediately influenced, and they too gradually become calmed.

Similarly, if we practice conscious breathing in the right way, our breathing becomes more regular, calm, and harmonious with every moment, and this regularity, calmness, and harmony of the breathing will spread to our bodies and minds, and the body and mind will benefit from it. It is only by these kinds of processes that the oneness of body and mind will be achieved. When there is oneness of body

and mind, the breathing serves as "harmonizer," and we realize peace, joy, and ease, the first fruits of meditation practice.

Fourth Exercise - Calming

'Breathing in, I calm my body. Breathing out, I calm my body.'

This exercise, a continuation of the third, uses the breath to realize peace and calm in the whole body. When our bodies are not at peace, it is hard for our minds to be at peace. Therefore, we should use our breathing to help the functions of our bodies be smooth and peaceful. If we are gasping for breath or if our breath is irregular, we cannot calm the functions of our bodies. So the first thing is to harmonize our breathing. Our in-breaths and out-breaths should flow smoothly and lightly. When our breath is harmonious, our bodies are also. Our breath needs to be light and even and not audible. It should flow smoothly, like a small stream of water running down fine sand into the ocean.

The more subtle our breath is, the more peaceful our bodies and minds will be. When we breathe in, we can feel the breath entering our bodies and calming all the cells of our bodies. When we breathe out, we feel the exhalation taking with it all our tiredness, irritation, and anxiety.

As we breathe, we can recite the following gatha to ourselves:

Breathing in, I calm my body.
Breathing out, I smile.
Dwelling in the present moment,
I know this is a wonderful moment.

We know that when we are meditating, body and mind are one, so we only need to calm the body in order to calm the mind. When we smile, we demonstrate the peace and joy of body and mind. Feelings of peace and joy are the nourishment of the practitioner and help the practitioner go far on the path of practice. To learn more about this, you are encouraged to practice the fifth and sixth exercises of *The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*. (*The Anapanasati Sutta*)

These two exercises are designed to help the practitioner nourish herself with the joy of meditational concentration. The essence of meditation practice is to come back to dwell in the present moment and to observe what is happening in the present moment.

"A wonderful moment" means that the practitioner can see the wonders of life in her body, mind, and breathing and can make the feelings of peace and happiness stable and strong.
Although we are now discussing the part of the sutra that teaches full awareness of the body in the body, since there are very close links between the body and the feelings, we should not hesitate to cross freely the boundary between the Establishment of the body and the Establishment of the feelings. As we already know, the peace of the body is the peace of the mind.

In exercises three and four, the practitioner follows the breath while returning to be one with the body and calming the whole of the body. Obviously, while practicing these breathing exercises, all your organs of sense perception- eyes, ears, nose, and tongue- are closed off so that the images of the world around do not come in and agitate the peace within. To return to the body in this way is also to return to the mind.

From time to time, we feel tired, and everything we do or say seems to come out wrong and create misunderstanding. We may think, "Today is not my day." At times like this, it is best simply to return to

the body, cut off all contact, and close the doors of the senses. Following our breathing, we can collect the mind, body, and breath, and they will become one. We will have a feeling of warmth, like someone sitting inside by a fireplace while the wind and rain are raging outside. This method can be practiced anywhere at any time, not just in the meditation hall. We come back in contact with ourselves and make ourselves whole again.

We should not think that to close the doors of the sense perceptions is to close ourselves off from life and the world, to sever our contact with life. When we are not truly ourselves, when we are divided and dispersed, we are not really in contact with life. The contact is profound only when we are really ourselves. If we are not ourselves in the present moment, when we look at the blue sky, we do not really see the blue sky. When we hold the hand of a child, we are not really holding the hand of a child. When we drink tea, we are not really drinking tea. Therefore, the wholeness of ourselves is the basis of any meaningful contact.

We can realize the wholeness of ourselves by means of conscious breathing, which brings us back to the body and mind. Realizing the wholeness of ourselves is also to renew ourselves in every moment. We become fresh, and others enjoy being with us. When we renew ourselves, we see everything else as new. The Bamboo Forest Zen Master once said: “Everything I touch becomes new.”

Fifth Exercise - Awareness of Bodily Positions

Moreover, when a practitioner walks, he is aware, ‘I am walking.’ When he is standing, he is aware, ‘I am standing.’ When he is sitting, he is aware, ‘I am sitting.’ When he is lying down, he is aware, ‘I am lying down.’ In whatever position his body happens to be, he is aware of the position of his body.

This exercise is the observation in mindfulness of the positions of the body. This is not just an exercise to be practiced at the time of sitting meditation or in the meditation hall. The meditation practices taught in *The Sutra on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness* can be used all the day long to help the practitioner remain in mindfulness.

When doing walking meditation in the meditation hall or outside, the practitioner can combine her breathing with her steps in order to remain steadily established in mindfulness. Before beginning any kind of walking meditation, we can recite the following gatha:

The mind can go in a thousand directions,
But on this beautiful path, I walk in peace.
With each step, a gentle wind blows.
With each step, a flower blooms.

Any time we sit down, we can follow our breath and use this gatha:

Sitting here
is like sitting under the Bodhi tree.
My body is mindfulness itself,
entirely free from distraction.

We can use our breathing in order to be aware of the positions of sitting and standing. When we are standing in a line waiting to buy a ticket, or when we are just sitting down and waiting for anything, we can recite the gatha, "Breathing in, I calm my body," in order to continue dwelling in mindfulness and to calm the body and mind.

Sixth Exercise - Awareness of Bodily Actions

Moreover, when the practitioner is going forward or backward, he applies full awareness to his going forward or backward. When he looks in front or looks

behind, bends down or stands up, he also applies full awareness to what he is doing. He applies full awareness to wearing the sanghati robe or carrying the alms bowl. When he eats or drinks, chews or savors the food, he applies full awareness to all this. When passing excrement or urinating, he applies full awareness to this. When he walks, stands, lies down, sits, sleeps or wakes up, speaks or is silent, he shines his awareness on all this.

This exercise is the observation and awareness of the actions of the body. This is the fundamental practice of the monk. When I was first ordained as a novice over sixty years ago, the first book my master gave me to learn by heart was a book of short verses (gathas) to be practiced while washing your hands, brushing your teeth, washing your face, putting on your clothes, sweeping the courtyard, relieving yourself, having a bath, and so on.

On hearing the sound of the bell, we would breathe consciously and recite this gatha:

Hearing the sound of the bell,
the afflictions are lifted.
Understanding grows strong,
and the awakened mind is born.

Practicing breathing in combination with reciting a gatha helps us dwell more easily in mindfulness. Mindfulness makes every action of our bodies more serene, and we become master of our bodies and minds. Mindfulness nurtures the power of concentration in us. Many of the gathas in the book I was given, *Gathas for Everyday Use*, a text by Chinese master Du Ti, were taken from *The Avatamsaka Sutra*. I have written a book of gathas in the same spirit, *Present Moment, Wonderful Moment.* These gathas are very easy to use and can also be combined with conscious breathing.

Without mindfulness, our actions are often hurried and abrupt. As we practice the sixth exercise, we may find that our actions slow down. If a novice applies himself to the practice of the sixth exercise, he will see that his everyday actions become harmonious, graceful, and measured. Mindfulness becomes visible in his actions and speech. When any action is placed in the light of mindfulness, the body and mind become relaxed, peaceful, and joyful. The sixth exercise is one to be used day and night throughout our entire lives.

Tenth Exercise - Healing Wounds with the Awareness of Joy

Further, bhikkhus, a practitioner is aware of body as body, when, thanks to having put aside the Five Desires, a feeling of bliss arises during his concentration and saturates every part of his body.

Further, bhikkhus, a practitioner who is aware of body as body feels the joy which arises during concentration saturate every part of his body. There is no part of his body this feeling of joy, born during concentration, does not reach.

Further, bhikkhus, a practitioner who is aware of body as body experiences a feeling of happiness which arises with the disappearance of the feeling of joy and permeates his whole body. This feeling of happiness which arises with the disappearance of the feeling of joy reaches every part of his body.

Further, bhikkhus, a practitioner who is aware of body as body envelops the whole of his body with a clear, calm mind, filled with understanding.

The purpose of this exercise is to bring about ease, peace, and joy; to heal the wounds of the body as well as of the heart and mind; to nourish us as we grow in the practice of joy; and to enable us to go far on the path of practice.

When the practitioner is able to put an end to agitation, desire, and hatred, he sits down in the lotus position and concentrates on his breath, and he feels a sense of ease and freedom. As a result, a feeling of joy arises in his body. You can practice according to the exercises which follow:

1. I am breathing in and making my whole body calm and at peace. I am breathing out and making my whole body calm and at peace. (Please see again the fourth exercise.)

2. I am breathing in and feeling joyful. I am breathing out and feeling joyful. (This is the fifth exercise of the Anapanasati.)

3. I am breathing in and feeling happy. I am breathing out and feeling happy. (This is the sixth exercise of the Anapanasati.)

4. I am breathing in and making my mind happy and at peace. I am breathing out and making my mind happy and at peace. (This is the tenth exercise of the Anapanasati.)

While practicing in this way, the practitioner feels the elements of joy and peace permeate every cell of his body. Please read the following excerpt from the second version:

Like the bath attendant, who, after putting powdered soap into a basin, mixes it with water until the soap paste has water in every part of it, so the practitioner feels the bliss that is born when the desires of the sense realms is put aside, saturate every part of his body.

The feeling of joy that is born when the practitioner lets go of his life of agitation, desire, and hatred will strengthen and penetrate more deeply when he has mastered the way of applying his mind:

Like a spring within a mountain whose clear, pure water flows out and down all sides of that mountain and bubbles up in places where water has not previously entered, saturating the entire mountain, in the same way joy, born during concentration, permeates the whole of the practitioner's body; it is present everywhere.

When the state of happiness is really present, the joy of the mind settles down to allow happiness to become steadier and deeper. For as long as the joy is still there, there goes with it, to a greater or lesser extent, conceptualization and excitement. "Joy" is a translation of the Sanskrit word *piti*, and "happiness" is a translation of *sukha*. The following example is often used to compare joy with happiness: Someone traveling in the desert who sees a stream of cool water experiences joy. When he drinks the water, he experiences happiness.

Just as the different species of blue, pink, red, and white lotus, which grow up from the bottom of a pond of clear water and appear on the surface of that pond, have their tap roots, subsidiary roots, leaves, and flowers all full of the water of that pond, and there is no part of the plant which does not contain the water, so the feeling of happiness which arises with the disappearance of joy permeates the whole of the practitioner's body, and there is no part which it does not penetrate.

At the time of the meditation, the practitioner feels happy and at peace. He lets his consciousness of this peace and happiness embrace his whole body, so that his body is saturated by it:

Just as someone who puts on a very long robe which reaches from his head to his feet, and there is no part of his body which is not covered by this robe, so the practitioner with a clear, calm mind envelops his whole body in understanding and leaves no part of the body uncovered. This is how the practitioner is aware of the body as the body, both within and without, and establishes mindfulness in the body with recognition, insight, clarity, and realization. This is called being aware of the body as the body.

As we have already seen, the function of this exercise is to nourish us with joy and happiness and to heal the wounds within us. But we have no doubts about letting go of this joy in order to embark on the work of observation. Joy and happiness come about because of physical and psychological conditions and are as impermanent as all other physical and psychological phenomena. Only when, thanks to mindful observation, we realize the impermanent, selfless, and interdependent nature of all that is, can we achieve freedom and liberation.

From the Commentary on The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing, by Thich Nhat Hanh

The First Subject of Full Awareness:

Following the breath in daily life-eliminating forgetfulness and unnecessary thinking (Methods 1-2)

Most of the readers of this book do not live in forests under trees, or in monasteries. In our daily lives, we drive cars and wait for buses, work in factories and offices, talk on the telephone, clean our houses, cook meals, wash clothes, and so on. Therefore, it is most important that we learn to practice Full Awareness of Breathing during our daily lives. Usually, when we perform these tasks, our thoughts wander, and our joys, sorrows, anger, and unease follow close behind. Although we are alive, we are not able to bring our minds into the present moment, and we live in forgetfulness.

We can begin by becoming aware of our breath, by following our breathing. Breathing in and breathing out, we know we are breathing in and out, and we can smile to affirm that we are ourselves, that we are in control of ourselves. Through awareness of breathing, we can be awake in and to the present moment. By being attentive, we have already established "stopping." i.e. concentration of mind. Breathing with full awareness helps our mind stop wandering in confused, never-ending thoughts.

Most of our daily activities can be accomplished while following our breath according to the Instructions in the sutra. When our work demands special attentiveness in order to avoid confusion or an accident, we can unite Full Awareness of Breathing with the task itself. For example, when we are carrying a pot of boiling water or doing electrical repairs, we can be aware of every movement of our

hands, and we can nourish this awareness by means of our breath: "I am breathing out, and I am aware my hands are carrying a pot of boiling water," or "I am breathing in and I am aware that my right hand is holding an electrical wire," or even "I am breathing in and I am aware that I am passing another car. I am breathing out and I know that the situation is under control." We can practice like this.

In fact, it is not enough to combine awareness of breathing only with tasks which require so much attention. We must also combine Full Awareness of our Breathing with all the movements of our body: "I am breathing in and I am sitting down." "I am breathing in and wiping the table." "I am breathing in and smiling at myself." "I am breathing in and lighting the stove." Stopping the random progression of thoughts and living in forgetfulness is a giant step forward in meditation practice. We can realize this step by following our breath and combining it with awareness of our daily activities.

There are people who have no peace or joy and even go insane simply because they cannot stop unnecessary thinking. They are forced to take sedatives to lull themselves to sleep. just to give their thoughts a rest. But even in their dreams, they continue to feel fears, anxieties, and unease. Thinking too much can cause headaches, and your spirit will suffer.

By following your breath and combining the Full Awareness of Breathing with your daily activities, you can cut across the stream of disturbing thoughts and light the lamp of awakening. Full awareness of an out-breath and an in-breath is something wonderful that anyone can practice. Even if you live in a monastery or a meditation center, you can practice in this way.

Combining full awareness of breathing with full awareness of the movements of the body during daily activities-walking, standing. lying, sitting, working-is a basic Dharma practice to cultivate

concentration and to live in an awakened state. During the first few minutes of sitting meditation, you can use this method to harmonize your breathing, and if it seems necessary, you can continue following your breath with full awareness throughout the entire period.

The Second Subject of Full Awareness:

Awareness of the Body (Method 3)

During the practice of meditation, body and mind become one. In the sitting, lying, standing, or walking position, we can practice awareness of the body, beginning by taking the different parts of our body one by one, and then taking the organism as a whole. We can start with our hair, and then go down to the tips of our toes. For example, when in the position of sitting meditation, after regulating your breathing, you begin by breathing out and you observe. "I am breathing out and am aware of the hair on my head." "I am breathing in and am aware of the contents of my skull." You can continue like this until you reach the tips of your toes.

In the process of the practice, feelings and considerations may arise. For example, I am passing my heart and suddenly I notice anxiety rising up in me with regard to a close friend's heart condition. I do not push this feeling away, I am cognizant of it: "I am breathing in and am aware that I am anxious about my friend's heart condition." Then you continue your journey of observation of your body under the supervision of the Full Awareness of Breathing.

Here is another example: When I am passing through the digestive organs, I see millions of minute living beings which are living along with me in my intestines. I do not push this perception away, I am simply cognizant of it: "I am breathing in and am aware of the minute organisms, living along with me and in me." If you see that your awareness of your symbiosis with these organisms is a rich subject for

meditation, you can recognize it as such and make an appointment with yourself to return to this subject later, and then continue with your journey of observation through the rest of your body.

You know that we give very little attention to the organs of our body. We are conscious of them only when they cause us pain and when we are starting to be ill. You can pass half your life seeking riches and fame without ever holding your little toe between your fingers in awakened awareness. Your little toe is very important, you know. It has been very kind to you for many years. If one day in the future there is a sign of cancer in it, what will you do?

Perhaps you think that to be aware of the body is not very important. But that is not true. Any physiological, psychological, or physical phenomenon can be a door which leads you to truth. You can meditate on your toe and reach the goal of realization. The secret of this practice is to concentrate the mind in order to observe each organ of the body in full awareness.

If you practice in this way, one day (perhaps tomorrow or even this afternoon) you may see deep and wonderful things which can change your view and way of life. The hair on your head seems very ordinary, but you should know that your hair is an ambassador of truth. Please receive the credentials of this hair. Observe them well and discover every message that each hair bears in itself. Are your eyes common physiological phenomena? They are the windows which open onto the miracle of reality. Do not neglect anything. Look deeply, and you will see. That is the practice of meditation.

The Third Subject of Full Awareness:

Realizing the Unity of Body and Mind (Method 4)

During another period of meditation, observe your whole body without discriminating between different parts: "I am breathing in and am aware of my whole body." (Method 3). At this point, let your breathing, your body, and your observing mind all become one. Breathing and body are one. Breathing and mind are one. Mind and body are one.

At the time of observation, mind is not an entity which exists independently, outside of your breathing and your body. The boundary between the subject of observation and the object of observation no longer exists. We observe "the body in the body." The mind does not stand outside of the object in order to observe it. The mind is one with the object it observes. This is the first principle-"subject and object are empty (subject and object are not two)" which has been developed extensively in the Mahayana tradition.

Practicing this way for 10 or 20 minutes, the flow of your breathing and your body become very calm, and your mind becomes much more at rest. When you first begin these practices, it seems quite rough, like coarsely milled wheat, like riding a horse for the first time, or like the sound of a church bell after its first jarring ring. But the flour becomes finer and finer, the horse rides more and more smoothly, and the sound of the bell becomes more and more beautiful. The fourth breathing method accompanies you on this path: "I am breathing in and making my whole body calm and at peace." It is like drinking a cool glass of lemonade on a hot day and feeling your body become cool inside.

When you breathe in, the air enters your body and calms all the cells of your body. At the same time, each "cell" of your breathing becomes more peaceful and each "cell" of your mind also becomes more peaceful. The three are one and each one is all three. This is the key to meditation.

If the horse trots peacefully, the rider rides peacefully. And the more relaxed the rider feels, the more relaxed the horse becomes. The same is true of the bell, the ear drum of the hearer, and the hearer himself.

Breathing brings the sweet joy of meditation to you. "The sweet joy of meditation" is the great happiness which meditation brings. It is food. If you are nourished by the sweet Joy of meditation, you become joyful, fresh, and tolerant, and everyone around you will benefit from your joy.

Although the aim of the fourth method of breathing offered by the Buddha-breathing in and out to make your body calm and at peace- is to bring calmness to the movements of your body, its effect is to bring calmness to your breathing and to your mind also. The calmness of one brings calmness to all three. In the calmness of meditation, discrimination between body and mind does not exist, and you dwell at rest in the state of "body and mind at one," no longer feeling that the subject of meditation exists outside the object of meditation.

The Fourth Subject of Full Awareness:

The Food of the Joy of Meditation (Methods 5-6)

Those who practice meditation should know how to nourish themselves on the joy of meditation, on the peace and joy of meditative concentration, in order to reach real maturity and help the world. Life in this world is both painful and miraculous. The Buddhist traditions of the Southern schools stress the painful side, while the Buddhist traditions of the Northern schools help us realize and appreciate the marvels of life.

The violet bamboo, the yellow flowers, the white clouds, and the full moon are all wondrous expressions of the Dharmakaya, the body of the Dharma. The body of a human being, although impermanent, without an independent self, and bound to suffering, is also wondrous, infinitely wondrous.

The initial joy of meditation is like leaving the city, with its hyperactivity and all its disturbing encounters, going off to the countryside to sit beneath a tree, alone. We feel totally at ease, peaceful and joyful. What a joy, what a relief, like when you complete a difficult examination and feel that you have laid aside all anxiety forevermore.

At the end of a busy day, you can turn off the TV, light a stick of incense to make the room fragrant, sit cross-legged, and begin to practice breathing. with a half-smile. You will feel great joy! This is the initial sensation of the peace and joy of meditation. The fifth breathing method, "I am breathing in and feeling joyful. I am breathing out and feeling joyful," helps us become aware of this sensation. If you can set aside the stresses and complications of your day, you will enter a meditation filled with joy. From this state, it is easy to arrive at the state of peace and happiness.

The sixth method establishes awareness of peace and happiness: "I am breathing in and feeling happy. I am breathing out and feeling happy." This happiness arises when we become free of incessant worrying and preoccupation, and from the fact that the body and mind are at ease.

When we have a toothache, we know that not having a toothache is a pleasurable feeling. But when we do not have a toothache, most of us are unaware of this pleasant feeling. Only after we become blind will we be aware that having eyes to see the blue sky and the white clouds is miraculous. While we can see, we are rarely aware of this miracle.

Practicing meditation is to be aware of both what is painful and what is miraculous. Happiness is the nourishment of the meditator, and it is not necessary to look for it outside of ourselves. We only need to be aware of the existence of happiness in order to have it immediately. Pleasant feelings are like the air around us- we can enjoy them as we need them. In Buddhist psychology, it is said there are three kinds of feelings: pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral (neither pleasant nor unpleasant). But when we practice meditation, we know that we can transform neutral feelings into pleasant ones, and nourish ourselves. Pleasant feelings transformed from neutral ones are more healthy and lasting than other pleasant feelings.

When we are constantly nourished by the happiness of meditation, we become at ease with ourself and others. We become tolerant and compassionate, and our happiness is transmitted to all those around us. Only if we have peace ourselves can we share peace with others. Only then do we have enough strength and patience to work helping others, facing many hardships with patience and perseverance.

Fourteen Verses on Meditation

Written by Thich Nhat Hanh

1.

Like the two wings of a bird,
the practices of stopping (shamatha) and looking deeply (vipashyana)
rely upon each other
and belong together, side by side.

2.

The practice of shamatha is to stop,
so that I may recognize and touch,
nourish and heal,
settle down and concentrate.

3.

The practice of vipashyana is to look deeply
into the nature of the five skandhas,
so that I may develop understanding
and transform suffering.

4.

My breathing and my steps
enable me to generate the energy of mindfulness,
so that I can be aware of and touch
the wonders of life within and around me.

5.

Calming body and mind,
receiving nourishment and healing,
protecting my six senses,
I maintain concentration.

6.

Looking deeply into the heart of reality
to see the true nature of things,
practicing vipashyana enables me to let go
of everything I am searching for, my desires, and my fears.

7.

Dwelling peacefully in the present moment,
transforming habit energies
gives rise to understanding,
freeing me from afflictions and pain.

8.

Impermanence is one with nonself.
Nonself is one with interdependent origination,
is one with emptiness, is one with conventional designation,
is one with the middle way, is one with interbeing.

9.

Emptiness, signlessness, and aimlessness
liberate me from suffering,
so that in my daily practice
I am not caught in mere intellectual understanding.

10.

Nirvana is nonattainment.
Sudden or gradual enlightenment are not different.
True realization is to live in freedom
right now in this moment.

11.

The essential sutras,
such as the Discourses on the Full Awareness of Breathing
and the Four Establishments of Mindfulness,
show me the path to transform body and mind,
step by step.

12.

The Mahayana sutras and teachings
open many fresh, wide gateways
allowing me to enter the depths of the stream of meditation
flowing from the Original Source of the Buddha's teachings.

13.

Not discriminating
between the practice offered by the Tathagata
and that of the ancestral teachers,
the Four Noble Truths perfectly interwoven
should serve as the foundation of an authentic transmission.

14.

Supported by the Sangha Body
my practice flows easier,
allowing me to swiftly realize
my great determination to love and understand all beings.

The Essential Guide to **Buddhist Teachings on Mindfulness**

LION'S ROAR

LION'S ROAR

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"MINDFULNESS" IS SUCH A BUZZWORD NOW that we might not even quite know what we mean when we say it. Ask yourself: Is it, A) a mind-state; B) a practice, C) a way of life, or — and the difference here is perhaps important — D) a lifestyle? Or might it be E), all of the above?

Such questions abound, in part, thanks to all the ways mindfulness has been packaged and presented as it's gone mainstream in recent years — arguably, some of those ways may not be so good. Some, though, are inarguably good. What's key, I reckon, is that the motivation behind one's adoption of mindfulness goes way beyond what it might do for us individually. Ideally, mindfulness helps us to be more at one with everyone, to retain what makes each of us unique while helping us to see through false separation. It helps us mitigate suffering, but not just for ourselves.

Without mindfulness, the Buddha's famed eightfold path to liberation and happiness would be only sevenfold—and therefore incomplete and, presumably, non-functioning. Mindfulness may be a quality that's innate in us all, but teaching it so that it applies to the whole of life has always been a Buddhist specialty.

—Rod Meade Sperry | Editorial Director, Special Projects & Lion'sRoar.com

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Mindfulness on a Lazy Summer's Day

Christopher Willard's father's magic trick taught him his first lesson on mindful awareness and the power of concentration, giving him insight into impermanence at the age of seven.

THE FIRST MEDITATION I ever learned was a gift from my father, when I was probably about six or seven years old. We were floating on a rubber raft in a pond, gazing up at the blue summer sky. Far above us we watched as massive white cumulus clouds slowly morphed into new forms and then gradually un-formed. My dad looked over at me and said, "Hey, want to see a magic trick?" Of course I did. What kid doesn't want to see his father perform magic?

"I'm going to make a cloud disappear with my mind." "No way!" I responded. "Sure, I'll do it. In fact, we can do it together. First, we need to pick a cloud, and since this is your first, let's start with a small one to practice." I picked a smallish looking puffy white cloud just visible above the jagged green line of trees ringing the

pond. "Now, all you have to do is focus on that cloud and just breathe in." I slowly inhaled the summer air, taking in the smells of pond water and suntan lotion as my belly filled up.

"And now, with each breath out, notice the cloud getting a little bit smaller." Sure enough, with each breath out, the cloud seemed to fade ever so slightly. We lay there for a few minutes, drifting in the sun and looking hard at that cloud, breathing together. I squirmed, and the rubber raft creaked underneath me.

"Keep focusing on that cloud," my father instructed. "Bring your mind back if it wanders; keep your mind focused on it or it won't disappear." We continued breathing, focusing, and sending our will toward that cloud as it faded itself away over the course of the next few minutes. It was the best magic trick I'd ever seen.

Of course, I look back now and understand that clouds will form and un-form in the sky regardless of my intention, will-power or desire. But still, at that moment, my breath and my mind seemed like the most powerful force in the world. Second only, maybe, to my Dad.

Years later, I still look up at clouds on a summer's day, and remember that afternoon and the power of my breath. When the clouds of my own mood darken around me, I can breathe through the storms of grief, anger, illness, or self-doubt. When storms of fear gather around the world, or the news headlines seem to cast a long shadow on the future, I know that as I keep breathing, they too will pass. And I know that the air I breathe connects all living beings, and how I breathe will affect me and all of those around me, a lesson that I look forward to passing on to my own children someday soon.

The Most Direct Path

Insight teacher **James Baraz** teaches how to train mindfulness with sitting meditation from the Vipassana tradition.

THE BUDDHA SPOKE of mindfulness as the most direct way to overcome sorrow and lamentation, end pain and anxiety, and realize the highest happiness. That's quite a claim!

What is so special about mindfulness? Of all the fifty-two mental factors listed in Buddhist psychology, mindfulness possesses a unique power. It weakens the negative or unwholesome mind states that cause us suffering, such as attachment, aversion, and confusion, and strengthens the wholesome mind states that lead to happiness, such as kindness, generosity, and wisdom. It can even help us develop the penetrating awareness that opens the mind to full awakening.

When I first learned about the transformative power of mindfulness, and experienced it for myself, I wanted to run down the streets telling anyone who would listen, "You just have to be mindful!" I've since learned that there are other important strategies that can help when life throws us a curve—compassion and loving-kindness practices, reaching out to friends, teachers, and

guides for wise counsel, trauma modalities where necessary. But after all these years, mindfulness still seems to me the primary tool for working with life's difficulties. Mindfulness trains us to be more conscious and awake to what's going on in our world. Mindfulness helps us respond with greater clarity and a kind heart to whatever situation we find ourselves in. It helps us to be more present for our lives.

However, as any student of Buddhism will tell you, mindfulness takes practice. It's one thing to have the intention to be present. It's quite another to actually do it. That's why formal mindfulness meditation is so crucial to being more mindful in all our daily activities. As with any skill, practicing mindfulness in a formal way will help it to arise naturally and spontaneously.

“It's one thing to have the intention to be present. It's quite another to actually do it. That's why formal mindfulness meditation is so crucial to being more mindful in all our daily activities.

In the Theravada tradition, mindfulness meditation is called Vipassana, which means “to see things clearly.” When you are mindful you know what is actually happening in your present moment's experience, without judging how it is or wishing it were different. If you have an itch, for example, mindfulness feels the

sensation of itching with no agenda to get rid of it. It is the bare knowing of experience. When you're mindful, the mind is fully present for what's actually happening. You are not lost in thought.

How exactly do you practice mindfulness meditation? As one of my teachers used to say, if you want to understand the mind, sit down and observe it. To begin, find a comfortable posture, sitting in a chair or on a meditation cushion or bench. Your posture should be a balanced expression of alertness and ease. I like Thich Nhat Hanh's suggestion of thinking of yourself like a mountain—strong, worthy of respect, here for any changes in the weather system. At the same time, allow any places of tension or holding to release, letting go of anything that you don't need. Feel your connection to the Earth and let it support you. It's here for you.

Mindfulness training usually begins with awareness of breathing. You collect and focus your attention on the breath wherever you feel it most clearly—the in- and out-breath at the nostrils, the rising and falling of the abdomen, or the whole body expanding and contracting. This is easier said than done, because the mind will soon wander into thought. Anyone who has ever tried to meditate knows this. You may be lost for five seconds or five minutes, but when the mind is gone, it's gone, and there's little you can do about it. This is not bad. It's just the way it is. The eye sees. The ear hears. The mind thinks. The mind is not the enemy. And it can be trained.

The key moment in the meditative process is the moment you realize you've been wandering. How you respond to that fact determines how you will relate to meditation practice. If you react with frustration and judgment, you will strengthen those qualities. If you get hooked by the thought and say, "Oh, let me go with this interesting thought," you'll be lost once again and, in a little while, feel more frustration. The secret to skillful meditation is bringing your attention back with great patience and kindness. Instead of feeling frustrated because you've been lost, you can appreciate that you've woken up from your daydream. In doing so, you will develop a healthy relationship with your mind, as you cultivate patience and kindness along with mindful awareness.

After establishing the breath as your connection or anchor to the present, you can then include any part of your experience as the subject of your mindfulness meditation. There is nothing outside the meditation field. Whether it's the breath, sensations, sounds, images, emotions, or the thinking process itself, you simply are aware of what is happening now, allowing your experience to be just as it is. When a loud sound calls your attention, mindfulness knows that hearing is happening. If you're restless, mindfulness knows that restlessness is here. If you are calm, mindfulness means simply knowing you are calm. Mindfulness does not try to fix anything.

Along with kindness and patience, it's important to let the mind be as relaxed and spacious as possible, so that it's not contracted or tight. This allows you to more easily open to anything

that arises. At the same time, if you bring a natural curiosity to what is happening in your experience, you will be more engaged and less likely to get bored or sleepy. Of course, when boredom or sleepiness come, they too are part of the moment's experience, so rather than trying to get rid of them, just include them.

Practicing mindfulness in formal meditation with this relaxed, interested, non-judging awareness will help you develop these qualities in the rest of your life. You will see for yourself why the Buddha called mindfulness the most direct way to overcome suffering and realize great happiness. Good luck!

More Truth, Less Suffering

Anushka Fernandopulle on how mindfulness reduces the suffering caused by our collective sense of separation.

AMONG ALL BUDDHIST SCHOOLS, mindfulness is most clearly emphasized and articulated in Theravada Buddhism—old school Buddhism developed in Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar. In the West, many people practice Insight Meditation, a practice coming from this school that includes training in mindfulness and other factors of mind that can help us develop insight into the way things are.

In Insight Meditation, we tune into the changing nature of all experience. We see the lack of solidity of everything, and thus the unreliability of things and experiences as places to seek and find lasting well-being. These insights can bring a fundamental shift in the way we relate to life. We no longer seek refuge in experiences that will vanish, and we can live life in greater harmony and peace.

Mindfulness is situated within a larger context of ethical trainings. These cover our actions, work, and speech; cultivating wholesome states of mind and heart; and clarifying our view of what is true. All of these are necessary to attain the goal of the path: freedom from suffering, stress, strain, grief, and despair.

Mindfulness is essential in developing this kind of wisdom, but it is not the only ingredient. Collectedness of mind (concentration or focus), balance of mind (equanimity), and investigation of experience are also important. A sense of ardency or passion is considered an essential factor on the path, and we need to develop wise attention, understanding how and to what we should be applying mindfulness.

> Mindfulness is situated within a larger context of ethical trainings. These cover our actions, work, and speech; cultivating wholesome states of mind and heart; and clarifying our view of what is true.

One of the frequent companions of mindfulness in the Buddhist teachings is *sampajanna*, translated as clear comprehension, clear knowing, or full awareness. The pairing of "mindfulness and clear comprehension" is as well-known to students of Theravada Buddhism as salt and pepper and bread and butter.

Sampajanna refers to understanding the broader context in which an action or experience is happening, including intention and impact. This contributes to the development of wisdom, which is the real goal of the practice.

We need to include this broader awareness so the practice is not one that supports self-absorbed disconnection. We can't be satisfied with just feeling the bare sensation of our foot on the

ground but must also know if we are stepping on somebody's foot. We can be aware of what our sandwich tastes like but also tune into whether we have taken someone else's sandwich, if everyone has a sandwich, or if it is even sandwich-eating time.

If we do not include a broader awareness in our practice of mindfulness, there can be a sense of separation from the world. Becoming more aware of those around us and our impact on others is essential on the path. The path of mindfulness, when it includes all these factors, is one that can lead to greater alignment with truth and less suffering for oneself and others.

Thich Nhat Hanh on The Practice of Mindfulness

Meditation master **Thich Nhat Hanh** teaches five mindfulness exercises to help you live with happiness and joy.

OUR TRUE HOME is not in the past. Our true home is not in the future. Our true home is in the here and the now. Life is available only in the here and the now, and it is our true home.

Mindfulness is the energy that helps us recognize the conditions of happiness that are already present in our lives. You don't have to wait ten years to experience this happiness. It is present in every moment of your daily life. There are those of us who are alive but don't know it. But when you breathe in, and you are aware of your in-breath, you touch the miracle of being alive. That is why mindfulness is a source of happiness and joy.

Most people are forgetful; they are not really there a lot of the time. Their mind is caught in their worries, their fears, their anger, and their regrets, and they are not mindful of being there. That state of being is called forgetfulness—you are there but you are not there. You are caught in the past or in the future. You are not there in the present moment, living your life deeply. That is forgetfulness.

The opposite of forgetfulness is mindfulness. Mindfulness is when you are truly there, mind and body together. You breathe in and out mindfully, you bring your mind back to your body, and you are there. When your mind is there with your body, you are established in the present moment. Then you can recognize the many conditions of happiness that are in you and around you, and happiness just comes naturally.

> You don't have to wait ten years to experience this happiness. It is present in every moment of your daily life.

Mindfulness practice should be enjoyable, not work or effort. Do you have to make an effort to breathe in? You don't need to make an effort. To breathe in, you just breathe in. Suppose you are with a group of people contemplating a beautiful sunset. Do you have to make an effort to enjoy the beautiful sunset? No, you don't have to make any effort. You just enjoy it.

The same thing is true with your breath. Allow your breath to take place. Become aware of it and enjoy it. Effortlessness. Enjoyment. The same thing is true with walking mindfully. Every step you take is enjoyable. Every step helps you to touch the wonders of life, in yourself and around you. Every step is peace. Every step is joy. That is possible.

During the time you are practicing mindfulness, you stop talking—not only the talking outside, but the talking inside. The talking inside is the thinking, the mental discourse that goes on

and on and on inside. Real silence is the cessation of talking—of both the mouth and of the mind. This is not the kind of silence that oppresses us. It is a very elegant kind of silence, a very powerful kind of silence. It is the silence that heals and nourishes us.

> When your mindfulness becomes powerful, your concentration becomes powerful, and when you are fully concentrated, you have a chance to make a breakthrough, to achieve insight.

Mindfulness gives birth to joy and happiness. Another source of happiness is concentration. The energy of mindfulness carries within it the energy of concentration. When you are aware of something, such as a flower, and can maintain that awareness, we say that you are concentrated on the flower. When your mindfulness becomes powerful, your concentration becomes powerful, and when you are fully concentrated, you have a chance to make a breakthrough, to achieve insight. If you meditate on a cloud, you can get insight into the nature of the cloud. Or you can meditate on a pebble, and if you have enough mindfulness and concentration, you can see into the nature of the pebble. You can meditate on a person, and if you have enough mindfulness and concentration, you can make a breakthrough and understand the nature of that person. You can meditate on yourself, or your anger, or your fear, or your joy, or your peace.

Anything can be the object of your meditation, and with the powerful energy of concentration, you can make a breakthrough and develop insight. It's like a magnifying glass concentrating the light of the sun. If you put the point of concentrated light on a piece of paper, it will burn. Similarly, when your mindfulness and concentration are powerful, your insight will liberate you from fear, anger, and despair, and bring you true joy, true peace, and true happiness.

When you contemplate the big, full sunrise, the more mindful and concentrated you are, the more the beauty of the sunrise is revealed to you. Suppose you are offered a cup of tea, very fragrant, very good tea. If your mind is distracted, you cannot really enjoy the tea. You have to be mindful of the tea, you have to be concentrated on it, so the tea can reveal its fragrance and wonder to you. That is why mindfulness and concentration are such sources of happiness. That's why a good practitioner knows how to create a moment of joy, a feeling of happiness, at any time of the day.

First Mindfulness Exercise: Mindful Breathing

The first exercise is very simple, but the power, the result, can be very great. The exercise is simply to identify the in-breath as in-breath and the out-breath as the out-breath. When you breathe in, you know that this is your in-breath. When you breathe out, you are mindful that this is your out-breath.

Just recognize: this is an in-breath, this is an out-breath. Very simple, very easy. In order to recognize your in-breath as in-breath, you have to bring your mind home to yourself. What is recognizing your in-breath is your mind, and the object of your mind—the object of your mindfulness—is the in-breath. Mindfulness is always mindful of something. When you drink your tea mindfully, it's called mindfulness of drinking. When you walk mindfully, it's called mindfulness of walking. And when you breathe mindfully, that is mindfulness of breathing.

> The in-breath can be a celebration of the fact that you are alive, so it can be very joyful.

So the object of your mindfulness is your breath, and you just focus your attention on it. Breathing in, this is my in-breath. Breathing out, this is my out-breath. When you do that, the mental discourse will stop. You don't think anymore. You don't have to make an effort to stop your thinking; you bring your attention to your in-breath and the mental discourse just stops. That is the miracle of the practice. You don't think of the past anymore. You don't think of the future. You don't think of your projects, because you are focusing your attention, your mindfulness, on your breath.

It gets even better. You can enjoy your in-breath. The practice can be pleasant, joyful. Someone who is dead cannot take any more in-breaths. But you are alive. You are breathing in, and while breathing in, you know that you are alive. The in-breath can be a

celebration of the fact that you are alive, so it can be very joyful. When you are joyful and happy, you don't feel that you have to make any effort at all. I am alive; I am breathing in. To be still alive is a miracle. The greatest of all miracles is to be alive, and when you breathe in, you touch that miracle. Therefore, your breathing can be a celebration of life.

An in-breath may take three, four, five seconds, it depends. That's time to be alive, time to enjoy your breath. You don't have to interfere with your breathing. If your in-breath is short, allow it to be short. If your out-breath is long, let it to be long. Don't try to force it. The practice is simple recognition of the in-breath and the out-breath. That is good enough. It will have a powerful effect.

Second Mindfulness Exercise: Concentration

The second exercise is that while you breathe in, you follow your in-breath from the beginning to the end. If your in-breath lasts three or four seconds, then your mindfulness also lasts three or four seconds. Breathing in, I follow my in-breath all the way through. Breathing out, I follow my out-breath all the way through. From the beginning of my out-breath to the end of my out-breath, my mind is always with it. Therefore, mindfulness becomes uninterrupted, and the quality of your concentration is improved.

So the second exercise is to follow your in-breath and your out-breath all the way through. Whether they are short or long, it doesn't matter. What is important is that you follow your

in-breath from the beginning to the end. Your awareness is sustained. There is no interruption. Suppose you are breathing in, and then you think, "Oh, I forgot to turn off the light in my room." There is an interruption. Just stick to your in-breath all the way through. Then you cultivate your mindfulness and your concentration. You become your in-breath. You become your out-breath. If you continue like that, your breathing will naturally become deeper and slower, more harmonious and peaceful. You don't have to make any effort—it happens naturally.

Third Mindfulness Exercise: Awareness of Your Body

The third exercise is to become aware of your body as you are breathing. "Breathing in, I am aware of my whole body." This takes it one step further.

In the first exercise, you became aware of your in-breath and your out-breath. Because you have now generated the energy of mindfulness through mindful breathing, you can use that energy to recognize your body.

"Breathing in, I am aware of my body. Breathing out, I am aware of my body." I know my body is there. This brings the mind wholly back to the body. Mind and body become one reality. When your mind is with your body, you are well-established in the here and the now. You are fully alive. You can be in touch with the wonders of life that are available in yourself and around you.

This exercise is simple, but the effect of the oneness of body and mind is very great. In our daily lives, we are seldom in that situation. Our body is there but our mind is elsewhere. Our mind may be caught in the past or in the future, in regrets, sorrow, fear, or uncertainty, and so our mind is not there. Someone may be present in the house, but he's not really there, his mind is not there. His mind is with the future, with his projects, and he's not there for his children or his spouse. Maybe you could say to him, "Anybody home?" and help him bring his mind back to his body.

So the third exercise is to become aware of your body. "Breathing in, I'm aware of my body." When you practice mindful breathing, the quality of your in-breath and out-breath will be improved. There is more peace and harmony in your breathing, and if you continue to practice like that, the peace and the harmony will penetrate into the body, and the body will profit.

Fourth Mindfulness Exercise: Releasing Tension

The next exercise is to release the tension in the body. When you are truly aware of your body, you notice there is some tension and pain in your body, some stress. The tension and pain have been accumulating for a long time and our bodies suffer, but our mind is not there to help release it. Therefore, it is very important to learn how to release the tension in the body.

In a sitting, lying, or standing position, it's always possible to release the tension. You can practice total relaxation, deep relaxation, in a sitting or lying position. While you are driving your car, you might notice the tension in your body. You are eager to arrive and you don't enjoy the time you spend driving. When you come to a red light, you are eager for the red light to become a green light so that you can continue. But the red light can be a signal. It can be a reminder that there is tension in you, the stress of wanting to arrive as quickly as possible. If you recognize that, you can make use of the red light. You can sit back and relax—take the ten seconds the light is red to practice mindful breathing and release the tension in the body.

> It is always possible to practice releasing the tension in yourself.

So next time you're stopped at a red light, you might like to sit back and practice the fourth exercise: "Breathing in, I'm aware of my body. Breathing out, I release the tension in my body." Peace is possible at that moment, and it can be practiced many times a day—in the workplace, while you are driving, while you are cooking, while you are doing the dishes, while you are watering the vegetable garden. It is always possible to practice releasing the tension in yourself.

Walking Meditation

When you practice mindful breathing you simply allow your in breath to take place. You become aware of it and enjoy it. Effortlessness. The same thing is true with mindful walking. Every step is enjoyable. Every step helps you touch the wonders of life. Every step is joy. That is possible.

You don't have to make any effort during walking meditation, because it is enjoyable. You are there, body and mind together. You are fully alive, fully present in the here and the now. With every step, you touch the wonders of life that are in you and around you. When you walk like that, every step brings healing. Every step brings peace and joy, because every step is a miracle.

The real miracle is not to fly or walk on fire. The real miracle is to walk on the Earth, and you can perform that miracle at any time. Just bring your mind home to your body, become alive, and perform the miracle of walking on Earth.

How RAIN Can Nourish You

Jack Kornfield teaches us the transformative mindfulness practice known as "RAIN."

MINDFULNESS does not reject experience. It lets experience be the teacher. With mindfulness, we can enter the difficulties in our life and find healing and freedom.

There are four principles for mindful transformation of difficulties that are taught in Western mindfulness retreats with the acronym (coined by Michele McDonald) called RAIN. RAIN stands for Recognition, Acceptance, Investigation, and Non-Identification. This acronym echoes the Zen poets who tell us "the rain falls equally on all things." Like the nourishment of outer rain, the inner principles of RAIN can transform our difficulties.

Recognition

Recognition is the first step of mindfulness. When we are stuck in our life, we must begin with a willingness to see what is so. It is as if someone asks us gently, what is happening now? Do we reply brusquely, "Nothing"? Or do we pause and acknowledge the reality of our experience, here and now?

With recognition we step out of denial. Denial undermines our freedom. The diabetic who denies his body is not free. Neither is the driven, stressed-out executive who denies the cost of her lifestyle, or the self-critical would-be painter who denies his love of making art. The society that denies its poverty and injustice has lost a part of its freedom as well. If we deny our dissatisfaction, our anger, our pain, our ambition, we will suffer. If we deny our values, our beliefs, our longings, or our goodness, we will suffer.

“If we deny our values, our beliefs, our longings, or our goodness, we will suffer.

“The emergence and blossoming of understanding, love, and intelligence has nothing to do with any outer tradition,” observes Zen teacher Toni Packer. “It happens completely on its own when a human being questions, wonders, listens, and looks without getting stuck in fear. When self-concern is quiet, in abeyance, heaven and earth are open.”

With recognition our awareness becomes like the dignified host. We name and inwardly bow to our experience: “Ah, sorrow; and now excitement; hmm, yes, conflict; and yes, tension. Oh, now pain, yes, and now, ah, the judging mind.” Recognition moves us from delusion and ignorance toward freedom. “We can light a lamp in the darkness,” says the Buddha. We can see what is so.

Acceptance

The next step of RAIN is acceptance. Acceptance allows us to relax and open to the facts before us. It is necessary because with recognition, there can come a subtle aversion, a resistance, a wish it weren't so. Acceptance does not mean that we cannot work to improve things. But just now, this is what is so. In Zen they say, "If you understand, things are just as they are. And if you don't understand, things are still just as they are."

Acceptance is not passivity. It is a courageous step in the process of transformation. "Trouble? Life is trouble. Only death is nice," Zorba the Greek declares. "To live is to roll up your sleeves and embrace trouble." Acceptance is a willing movement of the heart, to include whatever is before it. In individual transformation we have to start with the reality of our own suffering. For social transformation we have to start with the reality of collective suffering, of injustice, racism, greed, and hate. We can only transform the world as we learn to transform ourselves. As Carl Jung comments, "Perhaps I myself am the enemy who must be loved."

> With acceptance and respect, surprising transformations can occur.

With acceptance and respect, problems that seem intractable often become workable. A man began to give large doses of cod-liver oil to his Doberman because he had been told that the stuff was good for dogs. Each day he would hold the head of the

protesting dog between his knees, force its jaws open, and pour the liquid down its throat. One day the dog broke loose and the fish oil spilled on the floor. Then, to the man's great surprise, the dog returned to lick the puddle. That is when the man discovered that what the dog had been fighting was not the oil but his lack of respect in administering it. With acceptance and respect, surprising transformations can occur.

Investigation

Recognition and acceptance lead to the third step of RAIN, investigation. Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh calls this "seeing deeply." In recognition and acceptance we recognize our dilemma and accept the truth of the whole situation. Now we must investigate more fully. Buddhism teaches that whenever we are stuck, it is because we have not looked deeply enough into the nature of the experience.

Buddhism systematically directs our investigation to four areas that are critical for understanding and freedom. These are called the four foundations of mindfulness: body, feelings, mind, and dharma, the underlying principles of experience.

Here is how we can apply them when working with a difficult experience. Starting with investigation in the body, we mindfully locate where our difficulties are held. Sometimes we find heat, contraction, hardness, or vibration. Sometimes we notice throbbing, numbness, a certain shape or color. We can investigate whether we are meeting this area with resistance or with

mindfulness. We notice what happens as we hold these sensations with mindfulness. Do they open? Are there other layers? Is there a center? Do they intensify, move, expand, change, repeat, dissolve, or transform?

> With mindfulness, each feeling is recognized and accepted.

In the second foundation of mindfulness, we can investigate what feelings are part of this difficulty. Is the primary feeling tone pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral? Are we meeting this feeling with mindfulness? And what are the secondary feelings associated with it? Often we discover a constellation of feelings. A man remembering his divorce may feel sadness, anger, jealously, loss, fear, and loneliness. A woman who was unable to help her addicted nephew can feel longing, aversion, guilt, desire, emptiness, and unworthiness. With mindfulness, each feeling is recognized and accepted. We investigate how each emotion feels, whether it is pleasant or painful, contracted or relaxed, tense or sad. We notice where we feel the emotion in our body and what happens to it as it is held in mindfulness.

Next comes the mind. What thoughts and images are associated with this difficulty? What stories, judgments, and beliefs are we holding? When we look more closely, we often discover that

some of them are one-sided, fixed points of view, or out-moded, habitual perspectives. We see that they are only stories. They loosen their hold on us. We cling less to them.

The fourth foundation to investigate is called mindfulness of the dharma. Dharma is an important and multifaceted word that can mean the teachings and the path of Buddhism. It can mean the truth, and in this case it can also mean the elements and patterns that make up experience. In mindfulness of the dharma we look into the principles and laws that are operating. We can notice if an experience is actually as solid as it appears. Is it unchanging or is it impermanent, moving, shifting, recreating itself? We notice if the difficulty expands or contracts the space in our mind, if it is in our control or if it has its own life. We notice if it is self-constructed. We investigate whether we are clinging to it, resisting it, or simply letting it be. We see whether our relationship to it is a source of suffering or happiness. And finally, we notice how much we identify with it. This leads us to the last step of RAIN, non-identification.

Non-identification

In non-identification we stop taking the experience as me or mine. We see how our identification creates dependence, anxiety, and inauthenticity. In practicing non-identification, we inquire of every state, experience, and story, is this who we really are? We

see the tentativeness of this identity. Instead of identification with this difficulty, we let go and rest in awareness itself. This is the culmination of releasing difficulty through RAIN.

One Buddhist practitioner, David, identified himself as a failure. His life had many disappointments and after a few years of Buddhist practice, he was disappointed by his meditation too. He became calmer but that was all. He was still plagued by unrelenting critical thoughts and self-judgments, leftovers from a harsh and painful past. He identified with these thoughts and his wounded history. Even the practice of compassion for himself brought little relief.

Then, during a ten-day mindfulness retreat, he was inspired by the teachings on non-identification. He was touched by the stories of those who faced their demons and freed themselves. He remembered the account of the Buddha, who on the night of his enlightenment faced his own demons in the form of the armies and temptations of Mara. David decided to stay up all night and directly face his own demons. For many hours, he tried to be mindful of his breath and body. In between sittings, he took periods of walking meditation. At each sitting, he was washed over by familiar waves of sleepiness, body pains, and critical thoughts. Then he began to notice that each changing experience was met by one common element, awareness itself.

In the middle of the night, he had an "ah ha" moment. He realized that awareness was not affected by any of these experiences, that it was open and untouched, like space itself. All his struggles,

the painful feelings and thoughts, came and went without the slightest disturbance to awareness itself. Awareness became his refuge.

David decided to test his realization. The meditation hall was empty so he rolled on the floor. Awareness just noticed. He stood up, shouted, laughed, made funny animal noises. Awareness just noticed. He ran around the room, he lay down quietly, he went outside to the edge of the forest, he picked up a stone and threw it, jumped up and down, laughed, came back and sat. Awareness just noticed it all. Finding this, he felt free. He watched the sun rise softly over the hills. Then he went back to sleep for a time. And when he reawakened, his day was full of joy. Even when his doubts came back, awareness just noticed. Like the rain, his awareness allowed all things equally.

> Without identification, we can live with care, yet we are no longer bound by the fears and illusions of the small sense of self.

It would be too rosy to end this story here. Later in the retreat David again fell into periods of doubt, self-judgment, and depression. But now, even in the middle of it, he could recognize that it was just doubt, just judgment, just depression. He could not take it fully as his identity anymore. Awareness noticed this too. And was silent, free.

Buddhism calls non-identification the abode of the awakening, the end of clinging, true peace, nirvana. Without identification, we can live with care, yet we are no longer bound by the fears and illusions of the small sense of self. We see the secret beauty behind all that we meet. Mindfulness and fearless presence bring true protection. When we meet the world with recognition, acceptance, investigation and non-identification, we discover that wherever we are, freedom is possible, just as the rain falls on and nurtures all things equally.

What Mindfulness Is (Not)

You can't reduce mindfulness to just a single idea. **Andrew Olendzki** unpacks its many meanings in classical Buddhism.

PERHAPS THE BEST WAY to understand what mindfulness is, from a classical Buddhist perspective, is to recognize some of the things it is not.

Mindfulness does not just mean being aware or being conscious, because one is always conscious when not comatose or dead. Consciousness is the fundamental quality of mind, understood as an event that occurs rather than a thing that exists. As such, it is always present when any kind of experience takes place. If mindfulness meant to be aware, then we would always be mindful, automatically, in all circumstances.

Mindfulness does not just mean attention, because we are always paying attention. Attention is the mental factor that gathers all the other mental factors together and directs them to a single object, bringing coherence and focus to each mind moment. Our attention may wander from one object to another, and it may be unable to stay on the same object for multiple moments in a row, but it is always directed somewhere.

Mindfulness does not mean paying attention in the present moment, because all mind moments occur in the present moment. How could it be otherwise? It is not possible to see, hear, smell, taste, or touch an object in anything but the present moment. Mental objects like thoughts can take their content from the past (a memory) or the future (an imagination), but the process of thinking about the past or future always occurs in the present moment. When people talk about being aware in the present moment, they really just mean either getting out of the mind door and attending to one of the senses or being aware of the act of thinking without getting caught up in the content of the thought.

> Mindfulness is awareness, with attention, in the present moment, on purpose—and with an attitude or intentional stance of nonattached equanimity.

Nor can mindfulness be adequately identified as paying attention on purpose, or as we might put it, being conscious consciously. The difference between conscious awareness and unconscious awareness is the presence of the mental factors "applied thought" and "sustained thought." The first allows the mind to be directed to an object that is chosen by volition, and the second means we are able to hold our attention on the object of our choosing. Meditation training usually involves the intentional

directing and sustaining of attention in various ways, which develops the skill of concentration, but not all meditation is mindfulness meditation.

It is important to recognize that each of the mind states mentioned so far is ethically neutral and can be used for harm or good. Many of the ways we misbehave involve attention, volition, and concentration, and these same functions are at work when we are acting benevolently.

Let's turn now from what mindfulness isn't to what it is in the context of Buddhism.

Every moment of consciousness is accompanied by an emotional response, and this is where mindfulness is properly situated on the Buddhist maps of experience. Mindfulness is a quality of emotional response, a particular intentional stance and attitude toward the object of experience that shapes and textures how it is experienced by consciousness.

Mindfulness is an inherently wholesome or healthy mental factor, so it cannot function at any moment when the mind is under the influence of greed or hatred, even in their mildest versions of favoring and opposing. Anytime you want or don't want things be a certain way, the mind is not being mindful.

Mindfulness requires a thoroughgoing equanimity. This does not mean you don't care or are indifferent to what is happening, only that the mind is evenly balanced and fully aware of things exactly as they are, without the desire to change them by favoring one thing or opposing another.

Mindfulness is a mind state that is engaged with the object of attention, but that engagement is disengaged from craving. One breathes mindfully, not wanting the breath to be long or short but just being aware of it as it is. One walks mindfully, back and forth, with no desire to get somewhere, simply noticing the nuanced textures of physical sensations arising and passing away in the body. Mindfulness is thus all of the above—awareness, with attention, in the present moment, on purpose—with the important addition: and with an attitude or intentional stance of nonattached equanimity.

The Power of Awareness

Diana Winston on how to use the tools of mindfulness to work with negative patterns like shame, guilt, and self-criticism that stand in the way of caring for and liking yourself.

MY NINE-YEAR-OLD had saved up her money for roller blades. When we were at the sporting goods store, I got inspired too and purchased a pair of old-school white roller skates with pink wheels.

I was thrilled to share this new pastime with her and we spent the afternoon in blissful mommy–daughter union. We were learning together, it was outdoors, and we were away from screens.

It was all great until the next day, when I caught my toe in a crack, fell, and torqued my knee in an awful direction. Alongside the excruciating knee pain, I was filled with equally painful self-recriminations.

What was I thinking, what a stupid idea, I can't believe I screwed this up. Summer's ruined! If I got hurt, what's going to happen to her? I'm such a terrible mom. On and on it went.

Until I remembered to be mindful.

Then I saw I was caught in a painful cycle of self-blame, guilt, and judgment, all intensifying the physical pain and making me even more miserable. I paused and brought compassionate

attention to my breath and body. Noticing the thoughts and emotions that were arising, I calmed myself down and found my center. I remembered I was human, definitely fallible, and I would get through this. And I did (although my knee still hasn't fully recovered).

> Don't believe everything you think.

I, like everyone else, suffer from a challenging complex of thoughts and emotions that show up from time to time: self-judgment, self-criticism, guilt, shame. These emotions seem to be at epidemic levels in society today.

Because I've been meditating now for thirty years, I have tools at my disposal that I can deploy to work with these emotions and thoughts. When they pop up, as they did in my roller-skating misadventure, mindfulness tools are there for me. To help you work with your own painful thoughts and emotions when they arise, here is the approach I use when working with students, one that has kept me sane (most of the time) and self-compassionate for decades.

How to Get Off the Train of Thoughts

The simple mindfulness practice of returning our wandering mind to the present moment is the foundation. When we get submerged in shame, self-hatred, and guilt, we can train ourselves to come back to the present moment and find relief. It's helpful to

develop a regular, daily-ish meditation practice so that we have some understanding and experience with mindfulness in advance. Then we have the tools to apply it on the spot when the going gets rough.

The critical voices inside us take on a myriad of disguises, and mindfulness excels here. We learn to see those thoughts merely *as* thoughts—not to be taken as reality. One of my favorite bumper stickers is "Don't believe everything you think."

Thoughts, while potentially amazing, profound, and brilliant, are also the source of enormous suffering. We all have our top ten suffering thoughts—worry, judging, comparing, and for most of us, guilt, shame, and self-criticism. We can learn to bring a mindful approach to these thoughts.

I find a couple of analogies helpful.

Thoughts are like snowballs. We start out with a tiny bit of snow and if we're not mindful, it can grow into a giant snowball that overwhelms us. It's important to catch the thoughts when they're tiny to not let them escalate.

Thoughts are like trains. We get on a train (*I blew it today at work…*) and it leaves the station. The next thing we know we're twenty miles down the track—twenty minutes into disturbing, predictive, globalizing, or catastrophic ruminations (*so I'll probably be fired…*).

With mindfulness we have some choices. When we realize we're on the train, we can get off—it doesn't matter how long we've been ruminating. Or we can never get on the train in the first place—a thought arises, we see it as a thought, and we stay on the platform while the train passes.

How do we do this? Sometimes simply the power of noticing our thoughts in the moment is enough to help relieve them. Often we harangue ourselves without really noticing we are doing it, so this recognition is key. One more analogy: You know those thought bubbles that cartoon characters have over their heads? Imagine your critical thought is in a thought bubble. Now you can take the pin of mindfulness and pop it. Ah, sweet relief.

When meditators catch a thought with their awareness, the thought may just dissolve in that moment—they've "popped it" or "got off the train." This is wonderful when it happens, but it may be best case scenario. So I recommend that people also "note" thoughts: put soft mental labels on them like "self-criticism," "judgment," "worrying," "blaming," etc. Sometimes naming the thought can allow it to "pop." This strategy is often called "name it to tame it."

Now let's say that just labeling thought doesn't do much—we find ourselves still ruminating, acting like a dog with a bone. Then it's time to bring our attention into our body to notice if there is an emotion fueling the repetitive thought pattern.

How to Mindfully Hold Challenging Emotions

Study after study shows the benefit of using mindfulness to regulate challenging emotions. We can be mindful of thoughts and emotions together, or we can focus on a strong emotion alone.

Mindfully holding our emotions starts with recognition—labeling and recognizing what has taken you down: fear, grief, shame, guilt, and so on. We can label emotions in the same way we label thoughts. Often just recognizing, naming, and letting them be there without trying to alter them may be enough.

Or we can shift to investigating the emotion in real time, in our body. What's happening in this moment? *My stomach is clenched, my jaw is tight, my chest feels constricted.* We sit with these sensations and hold them as a compassionate witness, just as I try to do with my daughter.

One skillful approach is not to force ourselves to stay solely with the emotion, especially when it feels big and painful. It's helpful to have a pleasant or neutral part of our body that we can move our attention to, and then return to the challenging emotion/sensations in our body when we're ready. (If you don't have an easeful area in your body, you can imagine a nurturing time or place.) Moving our attention back and forth allows for a bit of rest, prevents us from getting overwhelmed, and helps to integrate the challenging emotion. It helps build up our mindfulness capacity to hold the difficult emotion.

As we attend to our emotions mindfully, we track them as they ebb and flow, move and shift, and intensify or dissipate. There are very specific sensations we can attend to: pulsing, pounding, contracting, vibrating, tightness, and so on. Sometimes, mindfully being with them allows them to pass through, like weather patterns. Sometimes they don't pass through, but we can hold them in our awareness and we are not disturbed by them. Sometimes they don't pass, and we feel overwhelmed, but a little voice inside us knows we're okay, even in the midst of strong, challenging feelings.

> When we get disidentification, so much freedom arises.

The key to the mindful approach is what's typically called "disidentification." This is the moment of recognition that we are not our thoughts or emotions. We go from "This is my thought or emotion that I'm entirely caught in," to "This thought is moving through me." "My thought" becomes "the thought." "Being the thought" is now "being *with* the thought."

This way we become disentangled from our painful thoughts and feelings, but we still have them. We're not trying to use mindfulness to become mindful zombies with no affect. With disidentification we are present with and fully embodying our experience. Yet we have some space, some witnessing, and I daresay, some freedom.

When we *get* disidentification, so much freedom arises.

How to Enlist Your Wisdom Mind

Traditional Buddhist mindfulness approaches are pretty strict: mindfulness is not intended to explore our psychological material and we must avoid analyzing the content of our thoughts and emotions at all costs. However, my experience is that in practice it is much more nuanced than that. Using simple investigative processes that are rooted in mindfulness, we can explore the nature and history of our patterns, reactivity, and repetitive thoughts in helpful ways.

First of all, when we are mindful of a thought or emotion, psychological understanding and insight may emerge quite spontaneously. We are sitting with our grief and then a memory of our childhood arises. As we hold that memory in kindness and awareness, we realize that this may be why our present-day grief seems so enormous in comparison to the actual trigger.

We can be proactive too. When our mind is concentrated, stable, and aware, a well-placed question can help us find some ease and understanding. For example, with strong, repetitive emotions like shame or self-judgment, we might ask ourselves: "What might be the wisdom within this judgment? Can I separate out the wisdom from the reactivity?" Or, "Is there a deeper need I am trying to fulfil? Can I meet this need in other ways?"

Questioning in this way is very different from ruminating, analyzing, or trying to figure something out. It is also different from psychotherapy. Instead, it's making space for our wisdom to emerge by dropping a question into our mind. It's like dropping a pebble into a pond—we look for the reverberations.

When I'm caught in an anxiety avalanche about my daughter, I might ask myself, *Is there a purpose this worry is serving?* My wisdom mind might offer: *I just want to protect her and keep her safe.* Then I let myself feel the deep love connected to that desire. I hold that love in awareness, and sometimes tears come. As I feel the love and grief comingled with the worry, there is a loosening inside me, and the anxiety often subsides.

Other skillful uses of thinking in the midst of self-judgment include asking ourselves, Is this really true? What part of this is true, and what part is worst case scenario? Am I globalizing here? Catastrophizing? Also helpful are simple reminders: This too shall pass. I will get through this.

I call these practices "enlisting the wisdom mind." Even in the midst of our neuroses, there is buried wisdom in us that we can learn to trust, listen to, and ultimately cultivate more fully, even when we're utterly miserable.

I remember once being caught in a cycle of shame I couldn't release. I was feeling like a terrible mommy and blaming myself for my inability to hold a boundary with my daughter. In my distorted thinking, I decided I had ruined her for life, that she was

going to walk all over me and would end up being a rotten adult. I knew I was globalizing and catastrophizing, but I couldn't shake the deep shame that kept arising.

As I sat with myself in the shame—and believe me, shame is awful to be mindful of—I held myself in awareness, felt the deep spikes and burning in my chest, and suddenly a thought emerged: *It's not your fault. Your neuroses were in perfect lockstep with her challenging behavior. If you could have done it differently you would have.*

At that moment my mind let go. I began to cry with relief and the shame evaporated. All that was left was compassion—for me, for other moms who suffer in this way, and for the ongoing co-triggering dance of mother and child since beginningless time.

When you're feeling horrible, a simple adaptation of Tibetan *tonglen* practice is to reflect on all of the people in the world who are feeling exactly the same way you are. As you take their suffering in a gentle way, you send out some compassion for all the people suffering like you are. You may feel the great relief of recognizing your common humanity, but stop if acknowledging all the suffering feels too overwhelming.

How to Use Your Mindfulness Toolbox

We can work with all of the mindfulness-based tools I have described, one by one, or in combination. Some of them will work for you at different times. Some you will feel more drawn to; some will feel less useful. You can use them in meditation, or on the

spot in daily life. Together, they form a comprehensive approach to mindfully holding challenging emotions. But remember to be gentle and kind to yourself in the process.

Will these techniques free you entirely from self-criticism, shame, and guilt? Probably not, but sustained practice will give you significantly more freedom from them, especially when supplemented with self-compassion practices and a recognition of your inner goodness. Personally, I have found that much of my core suffering has been transformed over time. I have significantly less self-hatred than I used to. I attribute that to my mindfulness practice (and other modalities like therapy). And when shame, guilt, and judgment do arise, like in the roller-skating fiasco, when you cultivate mindfulness and wisdom, you will find your (yup, I'm going here) footing, stay stable in the midst of reactivity, and experience (sorry) way smoother skating!

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness

In this excerpt from **Bhante Gunaratana**'s book *Four Foundations of Mindfulness in Plain English*, the great Theravada teacher explains why all practitioners should meditate on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, at every stage on the Buddhist path.

MINDFULNESS PRACTICE has deep roots in Buddhist tradition. More than 2,600 years ago, the Buddha exhorted his senior *bhikkhus*, monks with the responsibility of passing his teachings on to others, to train their students in the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

"What four?" he was asked.

"Come, friends," the Buddha answered. "Dwell contemplating the body in the body, ardent, clearly comprehending, unified, with concentrated one-pointed mind, in order to know the body as it really is. Dwell contemplating feeling in feelings... in order to know feelings as they really are. Dwell contemplating mind in mind... in order to know mind as it really is. Dwell contemplating dhamma in dhammas... in order to know dhammas as they really are."

The practice of contemplating (or as we might say, meditating on) the Four Foundations—mindfulness of the body, feelings, mind, and dhammas (or phenomena)—is recommended for

people at every stage of the spiritual path. As the Buddha goes on to explain, everyone—trainees who have recently become interested in the Buddhist path, monks and nuns, and even *arahants*, advanced meditators who have already reached the goal of liberation from suffering, "should be exhorted, settled, and established in the development of these Four Foundations of Mindfulness."

> We can assume that the word "bhikkhu" is used to mean anyone seriously interested in meditation. In that sense, we are all bhikkhus.

In this sutta, the Buddha is primarily addressing the community of bhikkhus, monks and nuns who have dedicated their lives to spiritual practice. Given this, you might wonder whether people with families and jobs and busy Western lives can benefit from mindfulness practice. If the Buddha's words were meant only for monastics, he would have given this talk in a monastery. But he spoke in a village filled with shopkeepers, farmers, and other ordinary folk. Since mindfulness can help men and women from all walks of life relieve suffering, we can assume that the word "bhikkhu" is used to mean anyone seriously interested in meditation. In that sense, we are all bhikkhus.

Let's look briefly at each of the four foundations of mindfulness as a preview of things to come.

Mindfulness of Body

By asking us to practice *mindfulness* of the body, the Buddha is reminding us to see "the body in the body." By these words he means that we should recognize that the body is not a solid unified thing, but rather a collection of parts. The nails, teeth, skin, bones, heart, lungs, and all other parts—each is actually a small "body" that is located in the larger entity that we call "the body." Traditionally, the human body is divided into thirty-two parts, and we train ourselves to be mindful of each. Trying to be mindful of the entire body is like trying to grab a heap of oranges. If we grab the whole heap at once, perhaps we will end up with nothing!

Moreover, remembering that the body is composed of many parts helps us to see "the body as body"—not as *my* body or as *myself*, but simply as a physical form like all other physical forms. Like all forms, the body comes into being, remains present for a time, and then passes away. Since it experiences injury, illness, and death, the body is unsatisfactory as a source of lasting happiness. Since it is not *myself*, the body can also be called "selfless." When mindfulness helps us to recognize that the body is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless, in the Buddha's words, we "know the body as it really is."

Mindfulness of Feelings

Similarly, by asking us to practice *mindfulness of feelings*, the Buddha is telling us to contemplate "the feeling in the feelings." These words remind us that, like the body, feelings can be subdivided.

Traditionally, there are only three types—pleasant feelings, unpleasant feelings, and neutral feelings. Each type is one "feeling" *in* the mental awareness that we call "feelings." At any given moment we are able to notice only one type. When a pleasant feeling is present, neither a painful feeling nor a neutral feeling is present. The same is true of an unpleasant or neutral feeling.

> The mind alone cannot exist, only particular states of mind that appear depending on external or internal conditions. Paying attention to the way each thought arises, remains present, and passes away, we learn to stop the runaway train.

We regard feelings in this way to help us develop a simple nonjudgmental awareness of what we are experiencing—seeing a particular feeling as one of many feelings, rather than as *my* feeling or as part of me. As we watch each emotion or sensation as it arises, remains present, and passes away, we observe that any feeling is impermanent. Since a pleasant feeling does not last and an unpleasant feeling is often painful, we understand that feelings are unsatisfactory. Seeing a feeling as an emotion or sensation rather than as my feeling, we come to know that feelings are selfless. Recognizing these truths, we "know feelings as they really are."

Mindfulness of Mind

The same process applies to *mindfulness of mind.* Although we talk about "the mind" as if it were a single thing, actually, mind or consciousness is a succession of particular instances of "mind in mind." As mindfulness practice teaches us, consciousness arises from moment to moment on the basis of information coming to us from the senses—what we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch—and from internal mental states, such as memories, imaginings, and daydreams. When we look at the mind, we are not looking at mere consciousness. The mind alone cannot exist, only particular states of mind that appear depending on external or internal conditions. Paying attention to the way each thought arises, remains present, and passes away, we learn to stop the runaway train of one unsatisfactory thought leading to another and another and another. We gain a bit of detachment and understand that we are not our thoughts. In the end, we come to know "mind as it really is."

Mindfulness of Dhammas

By telling us to practice *mindfulness of dhammas*, or phenomena, the Buddha is not simply saying that we should be mindful of his teachings, though that is one meaning of the word "dhamma." He is also reminding us that the dhamma that we contemplate is within us. The history of the world is full of truth seekers. The Buddha was one of them. Almost all sought the truth outside themselves. Before he attained enlightenment, the Buddha also searched outside of himself. He was looking for his maker, the

cause of his existence, who he called the "builder of this house." But he never found what he was looking for. Instead, he discovered that he himself was subject to birth, growth, decay, death, sickness, sorrow, lamentation, and defilement. When he looked outside himself, he saw that everyone else was suffering from these same problems. This recognition helped him to see that no one outside himself could free him from his suffering. So he began to search within. This inner seeking is known as "come and see." Only when he began to search inside did he find the answer. Then he said:

Many a birth I wandered in samsara,
Seeking but not finding the builder of this house.
Sorrowful is it to be born again and again.
Oh! House builder thou art seen.
Thou shall not build house again.
All thy rafters are broken.
Thy ridgepole is shattered.
The mind has attained the unconditioned.

Reproduced from *The Four Foundations of Mindfulness in Plain English* (Wisdom Publications)

10 Tips for a Mindful Home

Karen Maezen Miller offers 10 simple tips for keeping a a mindful home. *How* simple? Well, as Karen says, "If you can do the first one, the next nine take care of themselves."

1. Wake with the sun

There is no purer light than what we see when we open our eyes first thing in the morning.

2. Sit

Mindfulness without meditation is just a word.

3. Make your bed

The state of your bed is the state of your head.
Enfold your day in dignity.

4. Empty the hampers

Do the laundry without resentment or commentary and have an intimate encounter with the very fabric of life.

5. Wash your bowl

Rinse away self-importance and clean up your own mess. If you leave it undone, it will get sticky.

6. Set a timer

If you're distracted by the weight of what's undone, set a kitchen timer and, like a monk in a monastery, devote yourself whole-heartedly to the task at hand before the bell rings.

7. Rake the leaves

Rake, weed, or sweep. You'll never finish for good, but you'll learn the point of pointlessness.

8. Eat when hungry

Align your inexhaustible desires with the one true appetite.

9. Let the darkness come

Set a curfew on the internet and TV and discover the natural balance between daylight and darkness, work and rest.

10. Sleep when tired

Nothing more to it.

Here, Now, Aware: The Power of Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the essence of the contemplative path and the key to transforming our lives. Insight Meditation teacher **Joseph Goldstein** describes this simple yet profound expression of our mind's natural awareness.

MINDFULNESS IS THE KEY to the present moment. Without it we cannot see the world clearly, and we simply stay lost in the wanderings of our minds. Tulku Urgyen, a great Tibetan Dzogchen master of the last century, said, "There is one thing we always need, and that is the watchman named mindfulness—the guard who is always on the lookout for when we get carried away by mindlessness."

Mindfulness is the quality and power of mind that is deeply aware of what's happening—without commentary and without interference. It is like a mirror that simply reflects whatever comes before it. It serves us in the humblest ways, keeping us connected to brushing our teeth or having a cup of tea.

Mindfulness also keeps us connected to the people around us, so we don't just rush by them in the busyness of our lives. The Dalai Lama is an example of someone who beautifully embodies this quality of caring attention. After one conference in Arizona,

His Holiness requested that all the employees of the hotel gather in the lobby, so that he could greet each one of them before he left for his next engagement.

Mindfulness is the basis for wise action. When we see clearly what is happening in the moment, wisdom can direct our choices and actions, rather than old habits simply playing out our patterns of conditioning. And on the highest level, the Buddha spoke of mindfulness as the direct path to enlightenment: "This is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearing of pain and grief, for the attainment of the Way, for the realization of nirvana."

I began to practice meditation when I was in the Peace Corps in Thailand. At the time I was very enthusiastic about philosophical discussion. When I first went to visit Buddhist monks, I arrived with a copy of Spinoza's *Ethics* in my hand, thinking to engage them in debate. Then I started going to discussion groups for Westerners, held at one of the temples in Bangkok. I was so persistent in my questions that other people actually stopped coming to the groups. Finally, perhaps out of desperation, one of the monks said, "Why don't you start meditating?"

I didn't know anything about meditation at the time, and I became excited by the prospect of what I saw as an exotic Eastern practice. I gathered all the paraphernalia together, sat myself down on a cushion—and then set my alarm clock for five minutes.

Surprisingly, something important happened even in those few minutes. For the first time, I realized there was a way to look inward: there was a path for exploring the nature of my mind.

This realization is a turning point in everyone's spiritual life. We reach a certain point in our lives when something connects, and we acknowledge to ourselves, "Yes, I can do this." All of this was so new and interesting to me that, for a while, I'd invite my friends over to watch me meditate. Of course, they didn't often come back.

The Practice of Mindfulness

We can start the practice of mindfulness meditation with the simple observation and feeling of each breath. Breathing in, we know we're breathing in; breathing out, we know we're breathing out. It's very simple, but not easy. After just a few breaths, we hop on trains of association, getting lost in plans, memories, judgments, and fantasies. Sometimes it seems like we're in a movie theater where the film changes every few minutes. Our minds are like that. We wouldn't stay in a theater where the movies changed so rapidly, but what can we do about our own internal screening room?

This habit of wandering mind is very strong, even when our reveries aren't pleasant and, perhaps, aren't even true. As Mark Twain put it, "Some of the worst things in my life never happened." We need to train our minds, coming back again and again to the breath and simply beginning again.

As our minds slowly steady, we begin to experience some inner calm and peace. From this place of greater stillness, we feel our bodies more directly and begin to open to both the pleasant and unpleasant sensations that might arise. At first, we may resist unpleasant feelings, but generally they don't last that long. They are there for a while, we feel them, they're unpleasant—and then they're gone and something else comes along. And even if they come up repeatedly, over a period of time, we begin to see their impermanent, insubstantial nature and to be less afraid of feeling them.

A further part of the training is becoming aware of our thoughts and emotions, those pervasive mental activities that so condition our minds, our bodies, and our lives. Have you ever stopped to consider what a thought is—not the content but the very nature of thought itself? Few people really explore the question, "What is a thought?" What is this phenomenon that occurs so many times a day, to which we pay so little attention?

Not being aware of the thoughts that arise in our mind, nor of the very nature of thought itself, allows thoughts to then dominate our lives. Telling us to do this, say that, go here, go there, thoughts often drive us like we're they're servants.

Once, when I was teaching in Boulder, Colorado, I was sitting quite comfortably in my apartment. Thoughts were coming and going, when one arose in my mind that said, "Oh, a pizza would be nice." I wasn't even particularly hungry, but this thought lifted me out of the chair, took me out the door, down the stairs, into the

car, over to the pizza place, back into the car, up the stairs, and into my apartment, where I finally sat back down to eat the pizza. What drove that whole sequence of activity? Just a thought in my mind.

> Not being aware of the thoughts that arise in our mind, nor of the very nature of thought itself, allows thoughts to then dominate our lives.

Obviously, there is nothing wrong with going out for pizza. What does merit our attention, though, is how much of our lives is driven by thoughts. Unnoticed, they have great power. But when we pay attention, when we observe thoughts as they arise and pass away, we begin to see their essentially empty nature. They arise as little energy bubbles in the mind, rather than as reified expressions of a self.

Just as there was no all-powerful wizard behind the curtain in *The Wizard of Oz*, the only power our thoughts have is the power we give them. All thoughts come and go. We can learn to be mindful of them and not be carried away by the wanderings of our mind. With mindfulness, we can exercise wise discernment: "Yes, I will act on this one; no, I'll let that one go."

Working with Emotions

In the same way, we can train ourselves to be mindful of emotions, those powerful energies that sweep over our bodies and minds like great breaking waves. We experience such a wide range of emotions, sometimes within quite a short period of time: anger, excitement, sadness, grief, love, joy, compassion, jealousy, delight, interest, boredom. There are beautiful emotions and difficult ones—and for the most part, we are caught up in their intensity and the stories that give rise to them.

We easily become lost in our own melodramas. It's illuminating to drop down a level and look at the energy of the emotion itself. What is sadness? What is anger? Seeing more deeply requires looking not at the emotion's "story," but at how the emotion manifests in our minds and bodies. It means taking an active interest in discovering the very nature of emotion.

The American monk Ajahn Sumedho expressed this kind of interest and investigation very well. He suggested that in a moment of anger or happiness, we simply notice: "Anger is like this," "Happiness is like that." Approaching our emotional life in this way is quite different than drowning in the intensity of feelings or being caught on the rollercoaster of our ever-changing moods. To do this takes mindfulness, attention, and concentration. We need to take care, though, not to misunderstand this practice and end up suppressing emotions or pushing them aside. The meditative process is one of complete openness to feelings. From the meditative perspective, the question is, "How am I

relating to this emotion?" Am I completely identified with it or is the mind spacious enough to feel the grief, the rage, the joy, the love without being overwhelmed?

The Practice of Letting Go

As you meditate, keep bringing your attention back to what is happening in the moment: the breath, a feeling in the body, a thought, an emotion, or even awareness itself. As we become more mindful and accepting of what's going on, we find—both in meditation and in our lives—that we are less controlled by the forces of denial or addiction, two forces that drive much of life. In the meditative process we are more willing to see whatever is there, to be with it but not be caught by it. We are learning to let go.

In some Asian countries there is a very effective trap for catching monkeys. A slot is made in the bottom of a coconut, just big enough for the monkey to slide its hand in, but not big enough for the hand to be withdrawn when it's clenched. Then they put something sweet in the coconut, attach it to a tree, and wait for the monkey to come along. When the monkey slides its hand in and grabs the food, it gets caught. What keeps the monkey trapped? It is only the force of desire and attachment. All the monkey has to do is let go of the sweet, open its hand, slip out, and go free—but only a rare monkey will do that. And similarly, the twentieth-century Japanese Zen teacher Kosho Uchiyama speaks of "opening the hand of thought."

Another quality that develops in meditation is a sense of humor about our minds, our lives, and our human predicament. Humor is essential on the spiritual path. If you do not have a sense of humor now, meditate for a while and it will come, because it's difficult to watch the mind steadily and systematically without learning to smile. Someone once asked Sasaki Roshi whether he ever went to the movies. "No," he replied. "I give interviews."

> In the meditative process we are more willing to see whatever is there, to be with it but not be caught by it. We are learning to let go.

Some years ago I was on retreat with the Burmese meditation master Sayadaw U Pandita. He is a strict teacher, and everyone on the retreat was being very quiet, moving slowly, and trying to be impeccably mindful. It was an intense time of training. At meal-time, we would all enter the dining room silently and begin taking food, mindful of each movement.

One day, the person on line in front of me at the serving table lifted up the cover on a pot of food. As he put it down on the table, it suddenly dropped to the floor making a huge clanging noise. The very first thought that went through my mind was, "It wasn't me!" Now, where did that thought come from? With awareness, one can only smile at these uninvited guests in the mind.

Through the practice of meditation we begin to see the full range of the mind's activities, old unskillful patterns as well as wholesome thoughts and feelings. We learn to be with the whole passing show. As we become more accepting, a certain lightness develops about it all. And the lighter and more accepting we become with ourselves, the lighter and more accepting we are with others. We're not so prone to judge the minds of others, once we have carefully seen our own. The poet, W.H. Auden, says it well: "Love your crooked neighbor with all your crooked heart." Spacious acceptance doesn't mean that we act on everything equally. Awareness gives us the option of choosing wisely: we can choose which patterns should be developed and cultivated, and which should be abandoned.

Just as the focused lens of a microscope enables us to see hidden levels of reality, so too a concentrated mind opens us to deeper levels of experience and more subtle movements of thought and emotion. Without this power of concentration, we stay on the surface of things. If we are committed to deepening our understanding, we need to practice mindfulness and gradually strengthen concentration. One of the gifts of the teachings is the reminder that we can do this—each and every one of us.

Practicing in Daily Life

In our busy lives in this complex and often confusing world, what practical steps can we take to train our minds?

The first step is to establish a regular, daily meditation practice. This takes discipline. It's not always easy to set aside time each day for meditation; so many other things call to us. But as with any training, if we practice regularly we begin to enjoy the fruits. Of course, not every sitting will be concentrated. Sometimes we'll be feeling bored or restless. These are the inevitable ups and downs of practice. It's the commitment and regularity of practice that is important, not how any one sitting feels. Pablo Casals, the world-renowned cellist, still practiced three hours a day when he was ninety-three. When asked why he still practiced at that age, he said, "I'm beginning to see some improvement."

The training in meditation will only happen through your own effort. No one can do it for you. There are many techniques and traditions, and you can find the one most suitable for you. But regularity of practice is what effects a transformation. If we do it, it begins to happen; if we don't do it, we continue acting out the various patterns of our conditioning.

The next step is to train ourselves in staying mindful and aware of the body throughout the day. As we go through our daily activities, we frequently get lost in thoughts of past and future, not staying grounded in the awareness of our bodies.

A simple reminder that we're lost in thought is the very common feeling of *rushing*. Rushing is a feeling of toppling forward. Our minds run ahead of us, focusing on where we want to go, instead of settling into our bodies where we are.

Learn to pay attention to this feeling of rushing—which does not particularly have to do with how fast we are going. We can feel rushed while moving slowly, and we can be moving quickly and still be settled in our bodies. Either way, we're likely not present. If you can, notice what thought or emotion has captured the attention. Then, just for a moment, stop and settle back into the body: feel the foot on the ground, feel the next step.

> The practice is difficult to remember, but not difficult to do. It's all in the training: sitting regularly and being mindful of the body during the day.

The Buddha made a very powerful statement about this practice: "Mindfulness of the body leads to nirvana." This is not a superficial practice. Mindfulness of the body keeps us present—and therefore, we know what's going on. The practice is difficult to remember, but not difficult to do. It's all in the training: sitting regularly and being mindful of the body during the day.

To develop deeper concentration and mindfulness, to be more present in our bodies, and to have a skillful relationship with thoughts and emotions, we need not only daily training, but also time for retreat. It's very helpful, at times, to disengage from the busyness of our lives, for intensive spiritual practice. Retreat time is not a luxury. If we are genuinely and deeply committed to awakening, to freedom—to whatever words express the highest value you hold—a retreat is an essential part of the path.

We need to create a rhythm in our lives, establishing a balance between times when we are engaged, active, and relating in the world and times when we turn inward. As the great Sufi poet Rumi noted, "A little while alone in your room will prove more valuable than anything else that could ever be given you."

At first this "going inside" could be for a day, a weekend, or a week. At our meditation center, we also offer a three-month retreat every year, and at the new Forest Refuge, people have come for as long as a year. We can do whatever feels appropriate and possible to find balanced rhythm between our lives in the world and the inner silence of a retreat. In this way we develop concentration and mindfulness on deeper and deeper levels, which then makes it possible to be in the world in a more loving and compassionate way.

From A *Heart Full of Peace* (Wisdom Publications)

Mindfulness and the Buddha's Eightfold Path

To understand how to practice mindfulness in daily life, says **Gaylon Ferguson**, we have to look at all eight steps of the Buddha's noble eightfold path.

IN HIS FIRST TEACHING at Deer Park, the Buddha praised mindfulness: "The Noble Eightfold Path is nourished by living mindfully."

From the beginning, the path of awakening includes all aspects of our human lives: physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and social. The aim is a mindful life. This means that our relationship to our sexuality and our consumerist economic system, our parenting, and our politics are all part of the path.

This approach to living fully is outlined in the eightfold path. "Right mindfulness" is one aspect of this path, alongside right view, right intention, right effort, right meditative engagement, right speech, right livelihood, and right action. The Sanskrit word *samyak*—often translated as "right" or "perfect"—can also mean "complete." Engaging mindfulness encourages complete engagement with life.

Let's walk through these aspects of the Buddhist spiritual path, returning mindfulness to her rightful place among her seven less famous but equally important sisters and brothers.

Right View

The central view of the Buddha's teaching is a middle way, avoiding the extremes of aggressive asceticism (being harsh with ourselves and others) and laissez-faire indulgence (spiritual laziness). We approach all our experience with basic friendliness and respect. In the context of meditation practice, this means gently placing awareness on our bodies and minds in a "not too tight, not too loose" manner. Without this view of fundamental loving-kindness, there is no mindfulness meditation. Practicing mindfulness as mere mental gymnastics leaves us feeling even more depleted.

> Experience is the heart of the matter, but we need first to understand what we are doing, why we are doing it, and how mindfulness relates to the rest of our lives.

In a culture where "Just do it" now has the well-worn familiarity of a mantra, jumping into mindfulness practice without first contemplating the view seems an attractive option. Why study the classic teachings on meditation when the main point is to practice? Isn't the whole point not to think too much about it? But the Buddha wisely suggested study and contemplation as supports

to any practice. Yes, experience is the heart of the matter, but we need first to understand what we are doing, why we are doing it, and how mindfulness relates to the rest of our lives.

Right Intention

Why are we engaging in mindfulness? Contemplating our intention at the beginning of a session rouses our motivation. Our aim may be calmness or peace, stability or a more compassionate heart, or all of the above. The point is that we have already entered the session with some sense of purpose or direction. Take a moment for self-reflection and nonjudgmental self-awareness before rushing on. This gesture of self-respect can gently cut some of the momentum of our accumulated neurotic speed.

Acknowledging the motivation we already have can be the first step in an expanding journey. The stress and anxiety we sometimes feel are surely shared by others around us—in our families, our workplaces, our communities. Including a sense of practicing for their well-being and liberation is called "the great motivation." We are walking a path of awakening that includes being generous and caring, patient and helpful. This expansiveness of intention brings spaciousness and warmth to our sitting practice, allowing those heartfelt qualities to pervade our daily living with others.

Right Effort

Effort also has an associated slogan in contemporary culture: "No pain, no gain." If we don't try and try again and try harder, we are told, no result can be attained.

This can lead to a one-sided approach to exertion, as though the Buddha's meditation instruction was to place the attention "not too loosely, not too loosely." We can find ourselves practicing with hypervigilance, eager participants in a new spiritual sport called Extreme Effort. Meditators can develop a habitual tightness instead of cultivating the relaxed spaciousness of heart and mind that originally inspired us toward awakening.

My first Buddhist meditation teacher, Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, spoke of non-effort as a worthy partner to effort: "Effort, non-effort and effort, non-effort—it's beautiful."

> Mindfulness is an innate capacity, present in all sentient beings.

Yes, it is important to apply ourselves, to engage fully in mindful living. But it is equally important to release all trying and confidently trust our innate mindfulness to shine through. All the Buddhist traditions of natural wakefulness, original goodness, or buddhanature are based on this sense of inborn wisdom not produced by meditating or walking the path. This is the practice of basic sanity through what is called "just sitting" or

"non-meditation" or "primordial great perfection." As the pioneering Zen master Shunryu Suzuki Roshi phrased it: "The point we emphasize is strong confidence in our original nature."

In this view, mindfulness is not a special attainment or an extraordinary event in our life journey. Mindfulness is an innate capacity, present in all sentient beings. Walking the path, we are gently cultivating our own nature, allowing seeds of potential to blossom. From this perspective, awakening is as natural as the dawning of the sun. We are invited to begin each session by feeling this naturally awake quality—and to return to this original openness again and again during practice and everyday life.

Right Meditative Engagement

The Sanskrit word *samadhi* is often translated as "meditative absorption," but this can suggest being so absorbed in something (such as a favorite piece of music) that we are oblivious to everything around us.

If we engage our bodies and minds and breathing and emotions fully in mindfulness practice, on the other hand, that same quality of spacious connection can continue as we rise from meditation. Mindfulness goes hand in hand with noticing the environment around our body, around our breathing, around our thoughts and emotions. We listen to what our partner is saying rather than mentally replay the tense moments from our day at

work. We notice the swaying of the trees in the wind, just as we notice the movement of our legs in walking meditation. Same directness, same inclusiveness.

Right Speech

From mindful listening can arise mindful speaking. Here non-effort may provide another helpful hint: leaving pauses in our speech allows for genuine dialogue. Slowing down the impulsive momentum of saying one thing after another is a natural result of mindfulness. Mindful communication is the basis of mindful communities.

Mindless speech is speech that causes harm through gossip, slander, lying, and deception. The result of such speech—as when politicians play on our fears to incite hatred—is a divided society; we feel more disconnected from each other. Mindful speech is acting to heal societal wounds.

Right Livelihood

Mindfulness brings a sense of well-being, an inner richness we share with others by our work in a kindergarten or hospice, corporate offices or a bank. The ordinary meaning of "livelihood" connects it with surviving—the way we earn money in order to live. Right livelihood lifts our gaze from the simple mechanics of survival. Our work is the way we contribute to the common good.

Livelihood is our offering, an act of generosity. We are *called*—the root meaning of "vocation"—to serve and inspire, to propagate healthiness and sanity in myriad ways.

Right Action

Meditation in action is the natural expression of mindfulness. These steps on the path of awakening remind us that the proof of our practice is in the pudding of daily life. The whole purpose of this training, it has been said, is to manifest. Sitting still and radiating compassion are useful first steps, but now the old slogan is reborn amid the urgent necessity for compassionate activity to meet the challenges of climate change, increasing social inequality, and disintegrating societies based on fear: "Don't just sit there, do something!"

Let's conclude our contemplative walk by returning to where we began: the Buddha. The practice of mindfulness meditation and the teaching of the eightfold path have been handed down to us in human lineages of transmission beginning with the Awakened One. Thus, the Buddha stands as original ancestor as well as embodiment of the teacher principle. Living human teachers—sometimes called "spiritual friends"—remind us of the necessarily expansive quality of walking the path. We all have habitual blind spots, and so we contract from time to time into our own narrow versions of the path of awakening. Spiritual friends encourage and provoke and challenge us to engage mindfulness as a step toward a completely awakened life.

Mindfulness is the Best Medicine

After thirteen years as a Buddhist nun, **Sister Dang Nghiem** looks back on her medical career and realizes monastic practice and medicine aren't really that different.

I HAD GRADUATED from medical school and was doing my residency in family practice when I met Thich Nhat Hanh and his monastic community. Soon after that, my partner died suddenly in an accident. His death helped me make a decision to follow a life of Buddhist practice. I left medicine after seven years of training and became a nun.

I have been a monastic for thirteen years. Yet I see now that you do not need to leave your profession in order to live a mindful life, whether it's medicine or another kind of work. In everything you do, you can bring to it awareness of your breath and body. You can unite body and mind, instead of keeping them separate from each other. When you stand up, you can be aware that you are standing up. When you stretch your body, you can follow your breathing and your movements. With mindfulness of the body, your listening becomes deeper and you are more aware of what's going on around you. Then take that awareness into your daily life and into your work.

Imagine that you're a doctor and you're listening to a patient. If you're thinking about other patients in other rooms and you ask the patient the same question several times, this will only add to their sickness and fear. The patient already feels vulnerable from being sick in the hospital. Now they feel that you're not truly present for them. If your mind is thinking of other patients in other rooms, you're wasting your time and your patient's.

> In everything you do, you can bring to it awareness of your breath and body. You can unite body and mind, instead of keeping them separate from each other.

The present moment is the only moment we have.

It's the only moment in which we can make a difference for ourselves and others. Whatever we are doing and whomever we are with — whether it's ourselves, patients, clients, friends, or strangers — if we are truly anchored in our breath and our body, we can touch the moment deeply and be of benefit.

When I was a medical student, I took on a patient with end-stage gallbladder cancer. It was only three months into his diagnosis, but the cancer was already full blown. The patient, in his sixties, had become depressed and refused to eat. He was abrupt and harsh toward the nurses and doctors.

In the beginning, he wasn't friendly to me either, but slowly he opened up. Then he was given the option to have an operation to see whether or not the cancer could be removed safely. He

was reluctant and afraid. I told him that he had my full support in whichever decision he made. He decided to go through with the operation. Unfortunately, when the surgeons went in, they found that the cancer had metastasized to adjacent organs, and they closed his abdomen immediately.

That night I was on call and went to visit him. It was two o'clock in the morning. The other patient in his room was already sleeping, and the only illumination was from the light in the hallway. I sat quietly next to his bed. He said to me, "You know, doctor, I have no more hope. Yet, strangely enough, I feel more at peace in this moment than I have ever felt before."

I just sat with him. Before the operation, I had told him about my grandmother's death in Vietnam. She knew she was going to die and was peaceful about it. She called for all of her children to gather around her and she reminded them not to let me and my young brother know about her passing, because we were in the United States then and she didn't want to affect our studies.

My grandmother remained alert and peaceful during the last hours of her life. When I heard this account six months after her death, it changed my way of thinking about dying. When we live beautifully and when we die beautifully, it's a gift to ourselves, but it's also a gift to those who witness our lives and our deaths. This gift of non-fear is in fact the greatest gift that we can offer to our beloved.

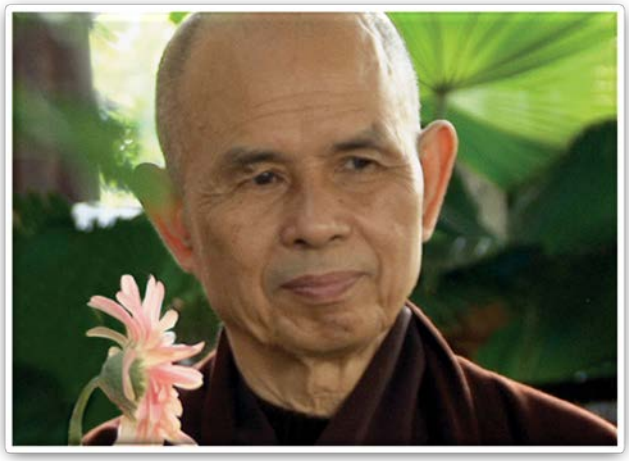
I said to my patient, "My grandmother died peacefully and beautifully. You can also choose to die like that. You can recall all of the grace you've received throughout your life and you can give thanks. You can die, knowing your time of death and staying peaceful."

When my patient was sent home, he was put on morphine for pain control, and he became confused and violent. His wife was frightened and saddened by this. Yet, during the last moments of his life, he became lucid. She called me the next day and told me, "He was so quiet and peaceful. Even though he couldn't talk to me, he knew I was there, and it made me so happy!" At least twice she told me that she was happy.

In my spiritual practice as a nun, I don't feel that I have left medicine. In fact, mindfulness is the most profound medicine that I can use in my daily life to take care of myself, and it's the greatest medicine that I can offer to others. I do not regret that I spent twenty-four years in school, then became a nun. There's no regret when you have done everything you can. If you give your whole heart to something, then when you make a shift to do something else, there is nothing to regret. Every moment is an opportunity to live and discover ourselves.

Five Steps to Mindfulness

By Thich Nhat Hanh



Our true home is not in the past. Our true home is not in the future. Our true home is in the here and the now. Life is available only in the here and the now, and it is our true home.

Mindfulness is the energy that helps us recognize the conditions of happiness that are already present in our lives. You don't have to wait ten years to experience this happiness. It is present in every moment of your daily life. There are those of us who are alive but don't know it. But when you breathe in, and you are aware of your in-breath, you touch the miracle of being alive. That is why mindfulness is a source of happiness and joy.

Most people are forgetful; they are not really there a lot of the time. Their mind is caught in their worries, their fears, their anger, and their regrets, and they are not mindful of being there. That state of being is called forgetfulness—you are there but you are not there. You are caught in the past or in the future. You are not there in the present moment, living your life deeply. That is forgetfulness.

The opposite of forgetfulness is mindfulness. Mindfulness is when you are truly there, mind and body together. You breathe in and out mindfully, you bring your mind back to your body, and you are there. When your mind is there with your body, you are established in the present moment. Then you can recognize the many conditions of happiness that are in you and around you, and happiness just comes naturally.

Mindfulness practice should be enjoyable, not work or effort. Do you have to make an effort to breath in? You don't need to make an effort. To breathe in, you just breathe in. Suppose you are with a group of people contemplating a beautiful sunset. Do you have to make an effort to enjoy the beautiful sunset? No, you don't have to make any effort. You just enjoy it.

The same thing is true with your breath. Allow your breath to take place. Become aware of it and enjoy it. Effortlessness. Enjoyment. The same thing is true with walking mindfully. Every step you take is enjoyable. Every step helps you to touch the wonders of life, in yourself and around you. Every step is peace. Every step is joy. That is possible.

During the time you are practicing mindfulness, you stop talking—not only the talking outside, but the talking inside. The talking inside is the thinking, the mental discourse that goes on and on and on inside. Real silence is the cessation of talking—of both the mouth and of the mind. This is not the kind of silence that oppresses us. It is a very elegant kind of silence, a very powerful kind of silence. It is the silence that heals and nourishes us.

Mindfulness gives birth to joy and happiness. Another source of happiness is concentration. The energy of mindfulness carries within it the energy of concentration. When you are aware of something, such as a flower, and can maintain that awareness, we say that you are concentrated on the flower. When your mindfulness becomes powerful, your concentration becomes powerful, and when you are fully concentrated, you have a chance to make a breakthrough, to achieve insight. If you meditate on a cloud, you can get insight into the nature of the cloud. Or you can meditate on a pebble, and if you have enough mindfulness and concentration, you can see into the nature of the pebble. You can meditate on a person, and if you have enough mindfulness and concentration, you can make a breakthrough and understand the nature of that person. You can meditate on yourself, or your anger, or your fear, or your joy, or your peace.

Anything can be the object of your meditation, and with the powerful energy of concentration, you can make a breakthrough and develop insight. It's like a magnifying glass concentrating the light of the sun. If you put the point of concentrated light on a piece of paper, it will burn. Similarly, when your mindfulness and concentration are powerful, your insight will liberate you from fear, anger, and despair, and bring you true joy, true peace, and true happiness.

When you contemplate the big, full sunrise, the more mindful and concentrated you are, the more the beauty of the sunrise is revealed to you. Suppose you are offered a cup of tea, very fragrant, very good tea. If your mind is distracted, you cannot really enjoy the tea. You have to be mindful of the tea, you have to be concentrated on it, so the tea can reveal its fragrance and wonder to you. That is why mindfulness and concentration are such sources of happiness. That's why a good practitioner knows how to create a moment of joy, a feeling of happiness, at any time of the day.

First Mindfulness Exercise: Mindful Breathing

The first exercise is very simple, but the power, the result, can be very great. The exercise is simply to identify the in-breath as in-breath and the out-breath as out-breath. When you breathe in, you know that this is your in-breath. When you breathe out, you are mindful that this is your out-breath.

Just recognize: this is an in-breath, this is an out-breath. Very simple, very easy. In order to recognize your in-breath as in-breath, you have to bring your mind home to yourself. What is recognizing your in-breath is your mind, and the object of your mind—the object of your mindfulness—is the in-breath. Mindfulness is always mindful of something. When you drink your tea mindfully, it's called mindfulness of drinking. When you walk mindfully, it's called mindfulness of walking. And when you breathe mindfully, that is mindfulness of breathing.

So the object of your mindfulness is your breath, and you just focus your attention on it. Breathing in, this is my in-breath. Breathing out, this is my out-breath. When you do that, the mental discourse will stop. You don't think anymore. You don't have to make an effort to stop your thinking; you bring your attention to your in-breath and the mental discourse just stops. That is the miracle of the practice. You don't think of the past anymore. You don't think of the future. You don't think of your projects, because you are focusing your attention, your mindfulness, on your breath.

It gets even better. You can enjoy your in-breath. The practice can be pleasant, joyful. Someone who is dead cannot take any more in-breaths. But you are alive. You are breathing in, and while breathing in, you know that you are alive. The in-breath can be a celebration of the fact that you are alive, so it can be very joyful. When you are joyful and happy, you don't feel that you have to make any effort at all. I am alive; I am breathing in. To be still alive is a miracle. The greatest of all miracles is to be alive, and when you breathe in, you touch that miracle. Therefore, your breathing can be a celebration of life.

An in-breath may take three, four, five seconds, it depends. That's time to be alive, time to enjoy your breath. You don't have to interfere with your breathing. If your in-breath is short, allow it to be short. If your out-breath is long, let it be long. Don't try to force it. The practice is simple recognition of the in-breath and the out-breath. That is good enough. It will have a powerful effect.

Second Mindfulness Exercise: Concentration

The second exercise is that while you breathe in, you follow your in-breath from the beginning to the end. If your in-breath lasts three or four seconds, then your mindfulness also lasts three or four seconds. Breathing in, I follow my in-breath all the way through. Breathing out, I follow my out-breath all the way through. From the beginning of my out-breath to the end of my out-breath, my mind is *always* with it. Therefore, mindfulness becomes uninterrupted, and the quality of your concentration is improved.

So the second exercise is to follow your in-breath and your out-breath all the way through. Whether they are short or long, it doesn't matter. What is important is that you follow your in-breath from the beginning to the end. Your awareness is sustained. There is no interruption. Suppose you are breathing in, and then you think, "Oh, I forgot to turn off the light in my room." There is an interruption. Just stick to your in-breath all the way through. Then you cultivate your mindfulness and your concentration. You become your in-breath. You become your out-breath. If you continue like that, your breathing will naturally become deeper and slower, more harmonious and peaceful. You don't have to make any effort—it happens naturally.

Third Mindfulness Exercise: Awareness of Your Body

The third exercise is to become aware of your body as you are breathing. "Breathing in, I am aware of my whole body." This takes it one step further.

In the first exercise, you became aware of your in-breath and your out-breath. Because you have now generated the energy of mindfulness through mindful breathing, you can use that energy to recognize your body.

"Breathing in, I am aware of my body. Breathing out, I am aware of my body." I know my body is *there*. This brings the mind wholly back to the body. Mind and body become one reality.

When your mind is with your body, you are well-established in the here and the now. You are fully alive. You can be in touch with the wonders of life that are available in yourself and around you.

This exercise is simple, but the effect of the oneness of body and mind is very great. In our daily lives, we are seldom in that situation. Our body is there but our mind is elsewhere. Our mind may be caught in the past or in the future, in regrets, sorrow, fear, or uncertainty, and so our mind is not there. Someone may be present in the house, but he's not really there, his mind is not there. His mind is with the future, with his projects, and he's not there for his children or his spouse. Maybe you could say to him, "Anybody home?" and help him bring his mind back to his body.

So the third exercise is to become aware of your body. "Breathing in, I'm aware of my body." When you practice mindful breathing, the quality of your in-breath and out-breath will be improved. There is more peace and harmony in your breathing, and if you continue to practice like that, the peace and the harmony will penetrate into the body, and the body will profit.

Fourth Mindfulness Exercise: Releasing Tension

The next exercise is to release the tension in the body. When you are truly aware of your body, you notice there is some tension and pain in your body, some stress. The tension and pain have been accumulating for a long time and our bodies suffer, but our mind is not there to help release it. Therefore, it is very important to learn how to release the tension in the body.

In a sitting, lying, or standing position, it's always possible to release the tension. You can practice total relaxation, deep relaxation, in a sitting or lying position. While you are driving your car, you might notice the tension in your body. You are eager to arrive and you don't enjoy the time you spend driving. When you come to a red light, you are eager for the red light to become

a green light so that you can continue. But the red light can be a signal. It can be a reminder that there is tension in you, the stress of wanting to arrive as quickly as possible. If you recognize that, you can make use of the red light. You can sit back and relax—take the ten seconds the light is red to practice mindful breathing and release the tension in the body.

So next time you're stopped at a red light, you might like to sit back and practice the fourth exercise: "Breathing in, I'm aware of my body. Breathing out, I release the tension in my body." Peace is possible at that moment, and it can be practiced many times a day—in the workplace, while you are driving, while you are cooking, while you are doing the dishes, while you are watering the vegetable garden. It is always possible to practice releasing the tension in yourself.

Fifth Exercise: Walking Meditation

When you practice mindful breathing you simply allow your in breath to take place. You become aware of it and enjoy it. Effortlessness. The same thing is true with mindful walking. Every step is enjoyable. Every step helps you touch the wonders of life. Every step is joy. That is possible.

You don't have to make any effort during walking meditation, because it is enjoyable. You are there, body and mind together. You are fully alive, fully present in the here and the now. With every step, you touch the wonders of life that are in you and around you. When you walk like that, every step brings healing. Every step brings peace and joy, because every step is a miracle.

The real miracle is not to fly or walk on fire. The real miracle is to walk on the Earth, and you can perform that miracle at any time. Just bring your mind home to your body, become alive, and perform the miracle of walking on Earth.

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Thich Nhat Hanh on The Practice of Mindfulness

The late Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh teaches five simple exercises to help you live with joy.

Thich Nhat Hanh

Our true home is not in the past. Our true home is not in the future. Our true home is in the here and the now. Life is available only in the here and the now, and it is our true home.

Mindfulness is the energy that helps us recognize the conditions of happiness that are already present in our lives. You don't have to wait ten years to experience this happiness. It is present in every moment of your daily life. There are those of us who are alive but don't know it. But when you breathe in, and you are aware of your in-breath, you touch the miracle of being alive. That is why mindfulness is a source of happiness and joy.

You don't have to wait ten years to experience this happiness. It is present in every moment of your daily life.

Most people are forgetful; they are not really there a lot of the time. Their mind is caught in their worries, their fears, their anger, and their regrets, and they are not mindful of being there. That state of being is called forgetfulness—you are there but you are not there. You are caught in the past or in the future. You are not there in the present moment, living your life deeply. That is forgetfulness.

The opposite of forgetfulness is mindfulness. Mindfulness is when you are truly there, mind and body together. You breathe in and out mindfully, you bring your mind back to your body, and you are there. When your mind is there with your body, you are established in the present moment. Then you can recognize the many conditions of happiness that are in you and around you, and happiness just comes naturally.

Mindfulness practice should be enjoyable, not work or effort. Do you have to make an effort to breathe in? You don't need to make an effort. To breathe in, you just breathe in. Suppose you are with a group of people contemplating a beautiful sunset. Do you have to make an effort to enjoy the beautiful sunset? No, you don't have to make any effort. You just enjoy it.

The same thing is true with your breath. Allow your breath to take place. Become aware of it and enjoy it. Effortlessness. Enjoyment. The same thing is true with walking mindfully. Every step you take is enjoyable. Every step helps you to touch the wonders of life, in yourself and around you. Every step is peace. Every step is joy. That is possible.

During the time you are practicing mindfulness, you stop talking—not only the talking outside, but the talking inside. The talking inside is the thinking, the mental discourse that goes on and on and on inside. Real silence is the cessation of talking—of both the mouth and the mind. This is not the kind of silence that oppresses us. It is a very elegant kind of silence, a very powerful kind of silence. It is the silence that heals and nourishes us.

Mindfulness gives birth to joy and happiness. Another source of happiness is concentration. The energy of mindfulness carries within it the energy of concentration. When you are aware of something, such as a flower, and can maintain that awareness, we say that you are concentrated on the flower. When your mindfulness becomes powerful, your concentration becomes powerful, and when you are fully concentrated, you have a chance to make a breakthrough, to achieve insight. If you meditate on a cloud, you can get insight into the nature of the cloud. Or you can meditate on a pebble, and if you have enough mindfulness and concentration, you can see into the nature of the pebble. You can meditate on a person, and if you have enough mindfulness and concentration, you can make a breakthrough and understand the nature of that person. You can meditate on yourself, or your anger, or your fear, or your joy, or your peace.

Anything can be the object of your meditation, and with the powerful energy of concentration, you can make a breakthrough and develop insight. It’s like a magnifying glass concentrating the light of the sun. If you put the point of concentrated light on a piece of paper, it will burn. Similarly, when your mindfulness and concentration are powerful, your insight will liberate you from fear, anger, and despair, and bring you true joy, true peace, and true happiness.

When your mindfulness becomes powerful, your concentration becomes powerful, and when you are fully concentrated, you have a chance to make a breakthrough, to achieve insight.

When you contemplate the big, full sunrise, the more mindful and concentrated you are, the more the beauty of the sunrise is revealed to you. Suppose you are offered a cup of tea, very fragrant, very good tea. If your mind is distracted, you cannot really enjoy the tea. You have to be mindful of the tea, you have to be concentrated on it, so the tea can reveal its fragrance and wonder to you. That is why mindfulness and concentration are such sources of happiness. That's why a good practitioner knows how to create a moment of joy, a feeling of happiness, at any time of the day.

FIRST MINDFULNESS EXERCISE: MINDFUL BREATHING

The first exercise is very simple, but the power, the result, can be very great. The exercise is simply to identify the in-breath as the in-breath and the out-breath as the out-breath. When you breathe in, you know that this is your in-breath. When you breathe out, you are mindful that this is your out-breath.

Just recognize: this is an in-breath, this is an out-breath. Very simple, very easy. In order to recognize your in-breath as in-breath, you have to bring your mind home to yourself. What is recognizing your in-breath is your mind, and the object of your mind —the object of your mindfulness—is the in-breath. Mindfulness is always mindfulness of something. When you drink your tea mindfully, it's called mindfulness of drinking. When you walk mindfully, it's called mindfulness of walking. And when you breathe mindfully, that is mindfulness of breathing.

So the object of your mindfulness is your breath, and you just focus your attention on it. Breathing in, this is my in-breath. Breathing out, this is my out-breath. When you do that, the mental discourse will stop. You don't think anymore. You don't have to make an effort to stop your thinking; you bring your attention to your in-breath and the mental discourse just stops. That is the miracle of the practice. You don't think of the past anymore. You don't think of the future. You don't think of your projects, because you are focusing your attention, your mindfulness, on your breath.

The in-breath can be a celebration of the fact that you are alive, so it can be very joyful.

It gets even better. You can enjoy your in-breath. The practice can be pleasant, joyful. Someone who is dead cannot take any more in-breaths. But you are alive. You are breathing in, and while breathing in, you know that you are alive. The in-breath can be a celebration of the fact that you are alive, so it can be very joyful. When you are joyful and happy, you don't feel that you have to make any effort at all. I am alive; I

am breathing in. To be still alive is a miracle. The greatest of all miracles is to be alive, and when you breathe in, you touch that miracle. Therefore, your breathing can be a celebration of life.

An in-breath may take three, four, five seconds, it depends. That's time to be alive, time to enjoy your breath. You don't have to interfere with your breathing. If your in-breath is short, allow it to be short. If your out-breath is long, let it be long. Don't try to force it. The practice is simple recognition of the in-breath and the out-breath. That is good enough. It will have a powerful effect.

SECOND MINDFULNESS EXERCISE: CONCENTRATION

The second exercise is that while you breathe in, you follow your in-breath from the beginning to the end. If your in-breath lasts three or four seconds, then your mindfulness also lasts three or four seconds. Breathing in, I follow my in-breath all the way through. Breathing out, I follow my out-breath all the way through. From the beginning of my out-breath to the end of my out-breath, my mind is always with it. Therefore, mindfulness becomes uninterrupted, and the quality of your concentration is improved.

So the second exercise is to follow your in-breath and your out-breath all the way through. Whether they are short or long, it doesn't matter. What is important is that you follow your in-breath from the beginning to the end. Your awareness is sustained. There is no interruption. Suppose you are breathing in, and then you think, "Oh, I forgot to turn off the light in my room." There is an interruption. Just stick to your in-breath all the way through. Then you cultivate your mindfulness and your concentration. You become your in-breath. You become your out-breath. If you continue like that, your breathing will naturally become deeper and slower, more harmonious and peaceful. You don't have to make any effort—it happens naturally.

THIRD MINDFULNESS EXERCISE: AWARENESS OF YOUR BODY

The third exercise is to become aware of your body as you are breathing. "Breathing in, I am aware of my whole body." This takes it one step further.

In the first exercise, you became aware of your in-breath and your out-breath. Because you have now generated the energy of mindfulness through mindful breathing, you can use that energy to recognize your body.

"Breathing in, I am aware of my body. Breathing out, I am aware of my body." I know my body is there. This brings the mind wholly back to the body. Mind and body

become one reality. When your mind is with your body, you are well-established in the here and the now. You are fully alive. You can be in touch with the wonders of life that are available in yourself and around you.

This exercise is simple, but the effect of the oneness of body and mind is very great. In our daily lives, we are seldom in that situation. Our body is there but our mind is elsewhere. Our mind may be caught in the past or in the future, in regrets, sorrow, fear, or uncertainty, and so our mind is not there. Someone may be present in the house, but he's not really there, his mind is not there. His mind is with the future, with his projects, and he's not there for his children or his spouse. Maybe you could say to him, "Anybody home?" and help him bring his mind back to his body.

So the third exercise is to become aware of your body. "Breathing in, I'm aware of my body." When you practice mindful breathing, the quality of your in-breath and out-breath will be improved. There is more peace and harmony in your breathing, and if you continue to practice like that, the peace and the harmony will penetrate into the body, and the body will profit.

FOURTH MINDFULNESS EXERCISE: RELEASING TENSION

The next exercise is to release the tension in the body. When you are truly aware of your body, you notice there is some tension and pain in your body, some stress. The tension and pain have been accumulating for a long time and our body suffers, but our mind is not there to help release it. Therefore, it is very important to learn how to release the tension in the body.

It is always possible to practice releasing the tension in yourself.

In a sitting, lying, or standing position, it's always possible to release the tension. You can practice total relaxation, deep relaxation, in a sitting or lying position. While you are driving your car, you might notice the tension in your body. You are eager to arrive and you don't enjoy the time you spend driving. When you come to a red light, you are eager for the red light to become a green light so that you can continue. But the red light can be a signal. It can be a reminder that there is tension in you, the stress of wanting to arrive as quickly as possible. If you recognize that, you can make use of the red light. You can sit back and relax—take the ten seconds the light is red to practice mindful breathing and release the tension in the body.

So next time you're stopped at a red light, you might like to sit back and practice the fourth exercise: "Breathing in, I'm aware of my body. Breathing out, I release the tension in my body." Peace is possible at that moment, and it can be practiced many times a day—in the workplace, while you are driving, while you are cooking, while you are doing the dishes, while you are watering the vegetable garden. It is always possible to practice releasing the tension in yourself.

WALKING MEDITATION

When you practice mindful breathing you simply allow your in-breath to take place. You become aware of it and enjoy it. Effortlessness. The same thing is true with mindful walking. Every step is enjoyable. Every step helps you touch the wonders of life. Every step is joy. That is possible.

You don't have to make any effort during walking meditation, because it is enjoyable. You are there, body and mind together. You are fully alive, fully present in the here and the now. With every step, you touch the wonders of life that are in you and around you. When you walk like that, every step brings healing. Every step brings peace and joy, because every step is a miracle.

The real miracle is not to fly or walk on fire. The real miracle is to walk on the Earth, and you can perform that miracle at any time. Just bring your mind home to your body, become alive, and perform the miracle of walking on Earth.

Breakthrough Into the Nature of Reality

by Thich Nhat Hanh

In Buddhism we practice mindfulness and concentration. Mindfulness is to be aware of what is there, and we can choose the object of our mindfulness. We can be aware of a flower or a cloud, or of our in-breath. The energy of mindfulness brings with it the energy of concentration. When mindfulness and concentration are powerful we get a breakthrough, an insight—we understand the nature of what is there.

Mindfulness, concentration, and insight. It is insight that can release us from our suffering. Prajna. We also talk of the Noble Eightfold Path and the first is Right View. Right View transcends all other views. Free from the notion of being and non-being. One method to get there is sahabhu. From here Thay explains the Four Noble Truths and the idea of non-dualism and why suffering is a noble truth.

Thay continues to share about the dual nature of birth and death: “We are experiencing birth and death at every moment. Death is now, together with birth. They manifest together at the same time. You cannot say the above exists, and then the below later. The have to exist at the same time. Why are we afraid of dying? Wherever there is death there is life. We are not used to seeing things and thinking of things in term of interbeing. That is why fear and despair are born.”

Buddha. Dharma. Sangha.
Son. Father. Holy Spirit.
Body. Mind. Environment.

> In neuroscience they ask whether consciousness is created by the brain; whether the brain and the mind are the same thing. How can something objective like the brain create something subjective like the mind. So there is the ‘in’ and the ‘out’; scientists are still caught in dualistic thinking. The wisdom of non-discrimination can help scientists to get an insight more quickly.

Thay dedicates the last section of the talk to the concrete practice of mindful breathing, including the first few steps of mindful breathing as delineated in the Mindfulness of Breathing Sutra.

Thich Nhat Hanh on The Practice of Mindfulness

The late Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh teaches five simple exercises to help you live with joy.

Our true home is not in the past. Our true home is not in the future. Our true home is in the here and the now. Life is available only in the here and the now, and it is our true home.

Mindfulness is the energy that helps us recognize the conditions of happiness that are already present in our lives. You don’t have to wait ten years to experience this happiness. It is present in every moment of your daily life. There are those of us who are alive but don’t know it. But when you breathe in, and you are aware of your in-breath, you touch the miracle of being alive. That is why mindfulness is a source of happiness and joy.

You don’t have to wait ten years to experience this happiness. It is present in every moment of your daily life.

Most people are forgetful; they are not really there a lot of the time. Their mind is caught in their worries, their fears, their anger, and their regrets, and they are not mindful of being there. That state of being is called forgetfulness—you are there but you are not there. You are caught in the past or in the future. You are not there in the present moment, living your life deeply. That is forgetfulness.

The opposite of forgetfulness is mindfulness. Mindfulness is when you are truly there, mind and body together. You breathe in and out mindfully, you bring your mind back to your body, and you are there. When your mind is there with your body, you are established in the present moment. Then you can recognize the many conditions of happiness that are in you and around you, and happiness just comes naturally.

Mindfulness practice should be enjoyable, not work or effort. Do you have to make an effort to breathe in? You don’t need to make an effort. To breathe in, you just breathe in. Suppose you are with a group of people contemplating a beautiful sunset. Do you have to make an effort to enjoy the beautiful sunset? No, you don’t have to make any effort. You just enjoy it.

The same thing is true with your breath. Allow your breath to take place. Become aware of it and enjoy it. Effortlessness. Enjoyment. The same thing is true with walking mindfully. Every step you take is enjoyable. Every step helps you to touch the wonders of life, in yourself and around you. Every step is peace. Every step is joy. That is possible.

During the time you are practicing mindfulness, you stop talking—not only the talking outside, but the talking inside. The talking inside is the thinking, the mental discourse that goes on and on and on inside. Real silence is the cessation of talking—of both the mouth and the mind. This is not the kind of silence that oppresses us. It is a very elegant kind of silence, a very powerful kind of silence. It is the silence that heals and nourishes us.

Mindfulness gives birth to joy and happiness. Another source of happiness is concentration. The energy of mindfulness carries within it the energy of concentration. When you are aware of something, such as a flower, and can maintain that awareness, we say that you are concentrated on the flower. When your

mindfulness becomes powerful, your concentration becomes powerful, and when you are fully concentrated, you have a chance to make a breakthrough, to achieve insight. If you meditate on a cloud, you can get insight into the nature of the cloud. Or you can meditate on a pebble, and if you have enough mindfulness and concentration, you can see into the nature of the pebble. You can meditate on a person, and if you have enough mindfulness and concentration, you can make a breakthrough and understand the nature of that person. You can meditate on yourself, or your anger, or your fear, or your joy, or your peace.

Anything can be the object of your meditation, and with the powerful energy of concentration, you can make a breakthrough and develop insight. It's like a magnifying glass concentrating the light of the sun. If you put the point of concentrated light on a piece of paper, it will burn. Similarly, when your mindfulness and concentration are powerful, your insight will liberate you from fear, anger, and despair, and bring you true joy, true peace, and true happiness.

When your mindfulness becomes powerful, your concentration becomes powerful, and when you are fully concentrated, you have a chance to make a breakthrough, to achieve insight.

When you contemplate the big, full sunrise, the more mindful and concentrated you are, the more the beauty of the sunrise is revealed to you. Suppose you are offered a cup of tea, very fragrant, very good tea. If your mind is distracted, you cannot really enjoy the tea. You have to be mindful of the tea, you have to be concentrated on it, so the tea can reveal its fragrance and wonder to you. That is why mindfulness and concentration are such sources of happiness. That's why a good practitioner knows how to create a moment of joy, a feeling of happiness, at any time of the day.

FIRST MINDFULNESS EXERCISE: MINDFUL BREATHING

The first exercise is very simple, but the power, the result, can be very great. The exercise is simply to identify the in-breath as the in-breath and the out-breath as the out-breath. When you breathe in, you know that this is your in-breath. When you breathe out, you are mindful that this is your out-breath.

Just recognize: this is an in-breath, this is an out-breath. Very simple, very easy. In order to recognize your in-breath as in-breath, you have to bring your mind home to yourself. What is recognizing your in-breath is your mind, and the object of your mind —the object of your mindfulness—is the in-breath. Mindfulness is always mindfulness

of something. When you drink your tea mindfully, it's called mindfulness of drinking. When you walk mindfully, it's called mindfulness of walking. And when you breathe mindfully, that is mindfulness of breathing.

So the object of your mindfulness is your breath, and you just focus your attention on it. Breathing in, this is my in-breath. Breathing out, this is my out-breath. When you do that, the mental discourse will stop. You don't think anymore. You don't have to make an effort to stop your thinking; you bring your attention to your in-breath and the mental discourse just stops. That is the miracle of the practice. You don't think of the past anymore. You don't think of the future. You don't think of your projects, because you are focusing your attention, your mindfulness, on your breath.

The in-breath can be a celebration of the fact that you are alive, so it can be very joyful.

It gets even better. You can enjoy your in-breath. The practice can be pleasant, joyful. Someone who is dead cannot take any more in-breaths. But you are alive. You are breathing in, and while breathing in, you know that you are alive. The in-breath can be a celebration of the fact that you are alive, so it can be very joyful. When you are joyful and happy, you don't feel that you have to make any effort at all. I am alive; I am breathing in. To be still alive is a miracle. The greatest of all miracles is to be alive, and when you breathe in, you touch that miracle. Therefore, your breathing can be a celebration of life.

An in-breath may take three, four, five seconds, it depends. That's time to be alive, time to enjoy your breath. You don't have to interfere with your breathing. If your in-breath is short, allow it to be short. If your out-breath is long, let it be long. Don't try to force it. The practice is simple recognition of the in-breath and the out-breath. That is good enough. It will have a powerful effect.

SECOND MINDFULNESS EXERCISE: CONCENTRATION

The second exercise is that while you breathe in, you follow your in-breath from the beginning to the end. If your in-breath lasts three or four seconds, then your mindfulness also lasts three or four seconds. Breathing in, I follow my in-breath all the way through. Breathing out, I follow my out-breath all the way through. From the beginning of my out-breath to the end of my out-breath, my mind is always with it. Therefore, mindfulness becomes uninterrupted, and the quality of your concentration is improved.

So the second exercise is to follow your in-breath and your out-breath all the way through. Whether they are short or long, it doesn't matter. What is important is that you follow your in-breath from the beginning to the end. Your awareness is sustained. There is no interruption. Suppose you are breathing in, and then you think, "Oh, I forgot to turn off the light in my room." There is an interruption. Just stick to your in-breath all the way through. Then you cultivate your mindfulness and your concentration. You become your in-breath. You become your out-breath. If you continue like that, your breathing will naturally become deeper and slower, more harmonious and peaceful. You don't have to make any effort—it happens naturally.

THIRD MINDFULNESS EXERCISE: AWARENESS OF YOUR BODY

The third exercise is to become aware of your body as you are breathing. "Breathing in, I am aware of my whole body." This takes it one step further.

In the first exercise, you became aware of your in-breath and your out-breath. Because you have now generated the energy of mindfulness through mindful breathing, you can use that energy to recognize your body.

"Breathing in, I am aware of my body. Breathing out, I am aware of my body." I know my body is there. This brings the mind wholly back to the body. Mind and body become one reality. When your mind is with your body, you are well-established in the here and the now. You are fully alive. You can be in touch with the wonders of life that are available in yourself and around you.

This exercise is simple, but the effect of the oneness of body and mind is very great. In our daily lives, we are seldom in that situation. Our body is there but our mind is elsewhere. Our mind may be caught in the past or in the future, in regrets, sorrow, fear, or uncertainty, and so our mind is not there. Someone may be present in the house, but he's not really there, his mind is not there. His mind is with the future, with his projects, and he's not there for his children or his spouse. Maybe you could say to him, "Anybody home?" and help him bring his mind back to his body.

So the third exercise is to become aware of your body. "Breathing in, I'm aware of my body." When you practice mindful breathing, the quality of your in-breath and out-breath will be improved. There is more peace and harmony in your breathing, and if you continue to practice like that, the peace and the harmony will penetrate into the body, and the body will profit.

FOURTH MINDFULNESS EXERCISE: RELEASING TENSION

The next exercise is to release the tension in the body. When you are truly aware of your body, you notice there is some tension and pain in your body, some stress. The tension and pain have been accumulating for a long time and our body suffers, but our mind is not there to help release it. Therefore, it is very important to learn how to release the tension in the body.

It is always possible to practice releasing the tension in yourself.

In a sitting, lying, or standing position, it's always possible to release the tension. You can practice total relaxation, deep relaxation, in a sitting or lying position. While you are driving your car, you might notice the tension in your body. You are eager to arrive and you don't enjoy the time you spend driving. When you come to a red light, you are eager for the red light to become a green light so that you can continue. But the red light can be a signal. It can be a reminder that there is tension in you, the stress of wanting to arrive as quickly as possible. If you recognize that, you can make use of the red light. You can sit back and relax—take the ten seconds the light is red to practice mindful breathing and release the tension in the body.

So next time you're stopped at a red light, you might like to sit back and practice the fourth exercise: "Breathing in, I'm aware of my body. Breathing out, I release the tension in my body." Peace is possible at that moment, and it can be practiced many times a day—in the workplace, while you are driving, while you are cooking, while you are doing the dishes, while you are watering the vegetable garden. It is always possible to practice releasing the tension in yourself.

WALKING MEDITATION

When you practice mindful breathing you simply allow your in-breath to take place. You become aware of it and enjoy it. Effortlessness. The same thing is true with mindful walking. Every step is enjoyable. Every step helps you touch the wonders of life. Every step is joy. That is possible.

You don't have to make any effort during walking meditation, because it is enjoyable. You are there, body and mind together. You are fully alive, fully present in the here and the now. With every step, you touch the wonders of life that are in you and around you. When you walk like that, every step brings healing. Every step brings peace and joy, because every step is a miracle.

The real miracle is not to fly or walk on fire. The real miracle is to walk on the Earth, and you can perform that miracle at any time. Just bring your mind home to your body, become alive, and perform the miracle of walking on Earth.

Five Steps to Mindfulness

You can learn how to create a moment of joy, a feeling of happiness, at any time of the day. Explore these 5 simple steps to enjoy more mindfulness.

Our true home is not in the past. Our true home is not in the future. Our true home is in the here and the now. Life is available only in the here and the now, and it is our true home.

Mindfulness is the energy that helps us recognize the conditions of happiness that are already present in our lives. You don't have to wait ten years to experience this happiness. It is present in every moment of your daily life. There are those of us who are alive but don't know it. But when you breathe in, and you are aware of your in-breath, you touch the miracle of being alive. That is why mindfulness is a source of happiness and joy.

Most people are forgetful; they are not really there a lot of the time. Their mind is caught in their worries, their fears, their anger, and their regrets, and they are not mindful of being there. That state of being is called forgetfulness—you are there but you are not there. You are caught in the past or in the future. You are not there in the present moment, living your life deeply. That is forgetfulness.

The opposite of forgetfulness is mindfulness. Mindfulness is when you are truly there, mind and body together. You breathe in and out mindfully, you bring your mind back to your body, and you are there. When your mind is there with your body, you are established in the present moment. Then you can recognize the many conditions of happiness that are in you and around you, and happiness just comes naturally.

Mindfulness practice should be enjoyable, not work or effort. Do you have to make an effort to breath in? You don't need to make an effort. To breathe in, you just breathe in. Suppose you are with a group of people contemplating a beautiful sunset. Do you have to make an effort to enjoy the beautiful sunset? No, you don't have to make any effort. You just enjoy it.

The same thing is true with your breath. Allow your breath to take place. Become aware of it and enjoy it. Effortlessness. Enjoyment. The same thing is true with walking mindfully. Every step you take is enjoyable. Every step helps you to touch the wonders of life, in yourself and around you. Every step is peace. Every step is joy. That is possible.

During the time you are practicing mindfulness, you stop talking—not only the talking outside, but the talking inside. The talking inside is the thinking, the mental discourse that goes on and on and on inside. Real silence is the cessation of talking—of both the mouth and of the mind. This is not the kind of silence that oppresses us. It is a very elegant kind of silence, a very powerful kind of silence. It is the silence that heals and nourishes us.

Mindfulness gives birth to joy and happiness. Another source of happiness is concentration. The energy of mindfulness carries within it the energy of concentration. When you are aware of something, such as a flower, and can maintain that awareness, we say that you are concentrated on the flower. When your mindfulness becomes powerful, your concentration becomes powerful, and when you are fully concentrated, you have a chance to make a breakthrough, to achieve insight. If you meditate on a cloud, you can get insight into the nature of the cloud. Or you can meditate on a pebble, and if you have enough mindfulness and concentration, you can see into the nature of the pebble. You can meditate on a person, and if you have enough mindfulness and concentration, you can make a breakthrough and understand the nature of that person. You can meditate on yourself, or your anger, or your fear, or your joy, or your peace.

> When your mindfulness becomes powerful, your concentration becomes powerful, and when you are fully concentrated, you have a chance to make a breakthrough, to achieve insight.

Anything can be the object of your meditation, and with the powerful energy of concentration, you can make a breakthrough and develop insight. It’s like a magnifying glass concentrating the light of the sun. If you put the point of concentrated light on a piece of paper, it will burn. Similarly, when your mindfulness and concentration are powerful, your insight will liberate you from fear, anger, and despair, and bring you true joy, true peace, and true happiness.

When you contemplate the big, full sunrise, the more mindful and concentrated you are, the more the beauty of the sunrise is revealed to you. Suppose you are offered a cup of tea, very fragrant, very good tea. If your mind is distracted, you cannot really enjoy the tea. You have to be mindful of the tea, you have to be concentrated on it, so the tea can reveal its fragrance and wonder to you. That is why mindfulness and concentration are such sources of happiness. That's why a good practitioner knows how to create a moment of joy, a feeling of happiness, at any time of the day.

SUMMARY

THE ESSENCE OF MINDFULNESS

Anchoring mind and body in the present moment to recognize life's simple joys—breath, movement, and stillness—without effort or judgment.

FIVE STEPS TO CULTIVATE JOYFUL PRESENCE

- **Mindful Breathing**: Label each in-breath and out-breath to still inner chatter and celebrate aliveness.
- **Concentration**: Follow each breath from start to finish to deepen focus and harmony.
- **Body Awareness**: Breathe while sensing your whole body, unifying mind and form in the here and now.
- **Release Tension**: Exhale consciously to let go of accumulated stress—practice anywhere, even at a red light.
- **Walking Meditation**: With effortless attention on each step, touch life's miracles and foster peace and joy.

WHY IT WORKS

Mindfulness energy cultivates concentration, leading to insights that liberate you from fear and despair, revealing true happiness in ordinary moments.

1) FIRST MINDFULNESS EXERCISE: MINDFUL BREATHING

The first exercise is very simple, but the power, the result, can be very great. The exercise is simply to identify the in-breath as in-breath and the out-breath as out-breath. When you breathe in, you know that this is your in-breath. When you breathe out, you are mindful that this is your out-breath.

Just recognize: this is an in-breath, this is an out-breath. Very simple, very easy. In order to recognize your in-breath as in-breath, you have to bring your mind home to yourself. What is recognizing your in-breath is your mind, and the object of your mind —the object of your mindfulness—is the in-breath. Mindfulness is always mindful of

something. When you drink your tea mindfully, it's called mindfulness of drinking. When you walk mindfully, it's called mindfulness of walking. And when you breathe mindfully, that is mindfulness of breathing.

So the object of your mindfulness is your breath, and you just focus your attention on it. Breathing in, this is my in-breath. Breathing out, this is my out-breath. When you do that, the mental discourse will stop. You don't think anymore. You don't have to make an effort to stop your thinking; you bring your attention to your in-breath and the mental discourse just stops. That is the miracle of the practice. You don't think of the past anymore. You don't think of the future. You don't think of your projects, because you are focusing your attention, your mindfulness, on your breath.

> Mindfulness is always mindful of something. When you drink your tea mindfully, it's called mindfulness of drinking. When you walk mindfully, it's called mindfulness of walking. And when you breathe mindfully, that is mindfulness of breathing.

It gets even better. You can enjoy your in-breath. The practice can be pleasant, joyful. Someone who is dead cannot take any more in-breaths. But you are alive. You are breathing in, and while breathing in, you know that you are alive. The in-breath can be a celebration of the fact that you are alive, so it can be very joyful. When you are joyful and happy, you don't feel that you have to make any effort at all. I am alive; I am breathing in. To be still alive is a miracle. The greatest of all miracles is to be alive, and when you breathe in, you touch that miracle. Therefore, your breathing can be a celebration of life.

An in-breath may take three, four, five seconds, it depends. That's time to be alive, time to enjoy your breath. You don't have to interfere with your breathing. If your in-breath is short, allow it to be short. If your out-breath is long, let it be long. Don't try to force it. The practice is simple recognition of the in-breath and the out-breath. That is good enough. It will have a powerful effect.

2) SECOND MINDFULNESS EXERCISE: CONCENTRATION

The second exercise is that while you breathe in, you follow your in-breath from the beginning to the end. If your in-breath lasts three or four seconds, then your mindfulness also lasts three or four seconds. Breathing in, I follow my in-breath all the way through. Breathing out, I follow my out-breath all the way through. From the

beginning of my out-breath to the end of my out-breath, my mind is *always* with it. Therefore, mindfulness becomes uninterrupted, and the quality of your concentration is improved.

So the second exercise is to follow your in-breath and your out-breath all the way through. Whether they are short or long, it doesn't matter. What is important is that you follow your in-breath from the beginning to the end. Your awareness is sustained. There is no interruption. Suppose you are breathing in, and then you think, "Oh, I forgot to turn off the light in my room." There is an interruption. Just stick to your in-breath all the way through. Then you cultivate your mindfulness and your concentration. You become your in-breath. You become your out-breath. If you continue like that, your breathing will naturally become deeper and slower, more harmonious and peaceful. You don't have to make any effort—it happens naturally.

3) THIRD MINDFULNESS EXERCISE: AWARENESS OF YOUR BODY

The third exercise is to become aware of your body as you are breathing. "Breathing in, I am aware of my whole body." This takes it one step further.

In the first exercise, you became aware of your in-breath and your out-breath. Because you have now generated the energy of mindfulness through mindful breathing, you can use that energy to recognize your body.

"Breathing in, I am aware of my body. Breathing out, I am aware of my body." I know my body is *there*. This brings the mind wholly back to the body. Mind and body become one reality. When your mind is with your body, you are well-established in the here and the now. You are fully alive. You can be in touch with the wonders of life that are available in yourself and around you.

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4) FOURTH MINDFULNESS EXERCISE: RELEASING TENSION

The next exercise is to release the tension in the body. When you are truly aware of your body, you notice there is some tension and pain in your body, some stress. The tension and pain have been accumulating for a long time and our bodies suffer, but our mind is not there to help release it. Therefore, it is very important to learn how to release the tension in the body.

> The tension and pain have been accumulating for a long time and our bodies suffer, but our mind is not there to help release it.

In a sitting, lying, or standing position, it’s always possible to release the tension. You can practice total relaxation, deep relaxation, in a sitting or lying position. While you are driving your car, you might notice the tension in your body. You are eager to arrive and you don’t enjoy the time you spend driving. When you come to a red light, you are eager for the red light to become a green light so that you can continue. But the red light can be a signal. It can be a reminder that there is tension in you, the stress of wanting to arrive as quickly as possible. If you recognize that, you can make use of the red light. You can sit back and relax—take the ten seconds the light is red to practice mindful breathing and release the tension in the body.

So next time you’re stopped at a red light, you might like to sit back and practice the fourth exercise: “Breathing in, I’m aware of my body. Breathing out, I release the tension in my body.” Peace is possible at that moment, and it can be practiced many times a day—in the workplace, while you are driving, while you are cooking, while you are doing the dishes, while you are watering the vegetable garden. It is always possible to practice releasing the tension in yourself.

5) WALKING MEDITATION

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mindful walking. Every step is enjoyable. Every step helps you touch the wonders of life. Every step is joy. That is possible.

> When you practice mindful breathing you simply allow your in breath to take place. You become aware of it and enjoy it. Effortlessness.

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